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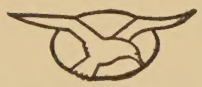

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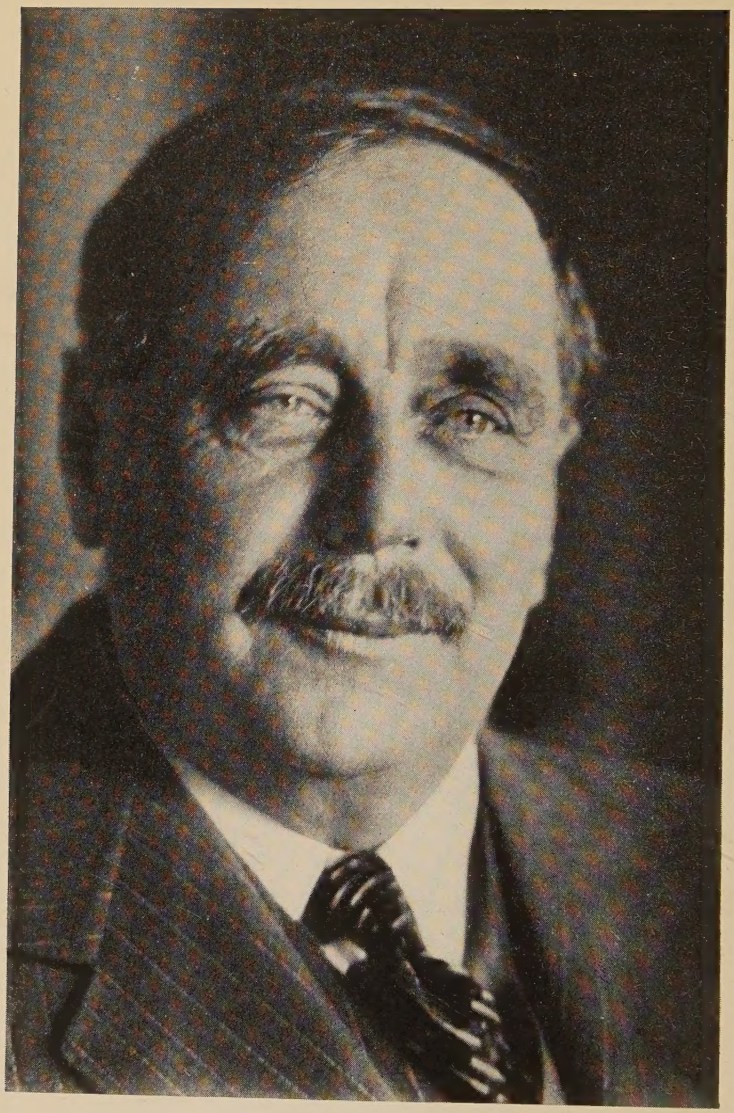

TODAY

H·G·WELLS

BY GEOFFREY WEST

WITH A SPECIALLY WRITTEN INTRODUCTION BY H. G. WELLS

"Qui plume a guerre a."

—Voltaire

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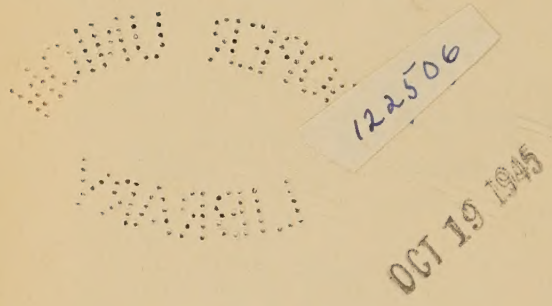

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TO

CATHERINE WELLS

A MOST GRACIOUS MEMORY

PREFACE

THERE is a feeling shared even by the subject of this book that an author's life is no fit matter, or at any rate no promising matter, for biography. I do not agree with Mr. Wells on this point any more than on a number of others. Authors, he says, lead, as a rule, lives of little significance outside their mental adventures. Yet surely such adventures are themselves as much matter for biography as any exploit in the spheres of war and politics. To follow in the succession of his books a great man's exploration of the Dark Continent of his own soul seems to me at least as exciting as to follow him along the tangled trails of the no longer Dark Continent of Africa! This may be thought the function of criticism rather than biography; I do not see how the two can be held apart. A man's personal life, his public activities, his art, his thought—all are equally products of nature and environment and one another, aspects only properly to be understood and evaluated in the light of the whole. In the case of any author, criticism must involve biography, biography criticism.

The original purpose of this book was critical; it has become now mainly biographical. Some may regard it even as perfunctory on the critical side; it is more than that, but deliberately it has been made suggestive, not exhaustive. As I worked on the material my interest in the man grew and grew; I came to realise how extraordinarily eventful in its own way his life had been, and how little really was known about it in detail. I felt that I wanted to tell as fully as possible the story of the origin, growth, and manifestation in every sphere of the activity which is H. G. Wells. That is what I have tried to do, as simply and dramatically as possible. Here will be found Wells

the Man, Wells the Artist, Wells the Thinker, but I can claim success only if they all appear as aspects of a single organic development.

That I am able to make my account so full and intimate is due principally to a friendliness and generosity on the part of Mr. Wells impossible to over-estimate. So far as any living man can be, he is the ideal biographee. His method has been to give me the freest possible access to the necessary information, written or verbal, and only to interpose when some misinterpretation or error in fact crept into my account. He has enabled me to quote or use many hundreds of unpublished private letters, he has allowed me to obtain the recollections of old friends and colleagues, he has submitted to exhaustive questioning on many points; he has, moreover, as he says, read my typescript through. In view of this last fact I should perhaps make it quite clear that all quotations of letters and incidents have been made at my own choice and entirely on my own responsibility; Mr. Wells has only verified my story, he has made no suggestions as to what should be put in or left out. In fact, a few minor alterations and additions have been made since the version he read. I may say that I have gone to some trouble to verify dates, and that where these differ from those recorded by Mr. Wells in his Atlantic Edition prefaces and elsewhere, it is usually on good evidence. The sources of quotations, other than mere phrases, if not acknowledged in the text or footnotes, may be presumed in most cases to be unpublished memoranda or letters, usually addressed to myself.

In addition to Mr. Wells I owe a great debt of gratitude to all those who have responded so freely and fruitfully to my appeals for information or letters. Especially I must thank Mr. Frank Wells (Mr. Wells's brother), Mr. William Baxter, Mr. Arnold Bennett, Mrs. Elizabeth (Healey) Bruce, Mr. William Burton, Sir Horace Byatt, Sir W. J. Collins, Professor A. Morley Davies, Mr. J. J. Fish, Sir Richard Gregory, Dr. Henry Hick, Mr. J. Melvin Lowson, Mr. J. Vine Milne, Mr. W. Pett Ridge, and Dr. A. E. H. Tutton, all of whom make some actual appearance, brief or prolonged, in the following pages, and whose material has been—as will be evident—of the greatest possible importance. I also wish to thank particularly Mr. Caldwell Harpur, Mrs. E. M. Hermes, Mr. J. S. Macdonald, Mr. Edward R. Pease, Mr. Ralph Straus, Miss Julia Weeks, Mr. George Weeks, and Mr. Gabriel Wells of New York, from whom I have received letters or reminiscences of intimate interest; and a special acknowledgment is due to Mrs. Winifred Simmons for her

loan of the very valuable letters written by Mr. Wells to her husband, the late A. T. Simmons. Then I must express my indebtedness to the following for helpfulness none the less appreciated—nor indeed, the less helpful—if in individual cases space and other considerations have not permitted me to use the material supplied, or to use it only partially: Mr. James Bernard, Miss C. R. Berryman, Miss G. H. Barr, Miss G. E. Byatt, Mrs. A. W. Claremont, Mrs. I. M. Cowley, Mr. Cyril Clemens, Mr. Will Day, Mr. William Farren, Mr. F. W. Galton (present secretary of the Fabian Society), Mr. Vyvyan Holland, Mr. G. R. Hayes, the Rev. Bernard Heald (headmaster of Midhurst Grammar School), Mr. S. W. Heaton of the University Tutorial Press, Mr. J. H. Humphreys of the Proportional Representation Society, the Hon. Ivor Montagu, the Rev. W. King H. Macdonald, Miss G. E. Malpass, Mr. A. A. Milne, Mrs. E. M. Moore, Captain F. L. Pleadwell, Mr. Robert W. Paul, Mr. C. E. H. Parham, Mr. R. Critchell Rimington, Mr. Terry Ramsaye, Mr. Ernest F. Row, Sir Denison Ross, Mr. Frank Slater, Dr. Marie Stopes, Mr. Herbert Tremayne, Miss Alice Woods, Mrs. Winifred Stephens Whale, the secretaries of the College of Preceptors, the Imperial College of Science and Technology at South Kensington, the University of London, and the League of Nations Union, the managers of the Encyclopedia Britannica Co., Ltd., and the *Family Herald* Press. I find that I have totally mislaid the name of the gentleman who had the happy idea of sending me a miscellaneous collection of newspaper cuttings relating to Mr. Wells; to him and to any others I may have overlooked I offer my apologies.

For the loan of the sketches reproduced in facsimile I am indebted to Mr. Ralph Straus (two), Mrs. Winifred Simmons (two), Professor A. Morley Davies, and Mr. Arnold Bennett. The fragment of letter to the last evidently refers to his play, *What the Public Wants,* first acted in 1909.

Finally I must express a more personal indebtedness to my wife, for taking on herself so much of the hard labour of copying and checking inevitable in any biography, to Mr. Jack Turner (my literary conscience), and also to my friends, Mr. Charles Kelly and Mr. Mervyn Thomas.

GEOFFREY WEST

CONTENTS

PREFACE vii

INTRODUCTION BY H. G. WELLS xv

BOOK ONE:

THE MAN IN THE MAKING. 1866–1895

1. The Boy 21
2. The Student 48
3. The Teacher 63
4. The Journalist 91

BOOK TWO:

THE NOVELIST. 1895–1914

5. The Scientific Romancer 103
6. The Man of Letters 117
7. The Fabian 143
8. The Novelist of Life 155
9. The Novelist of Ideas 168

BOOK THREE:

THE PROPHET OF WORLD ORGANISATION. 1914–1930

10. The Patriot 185
11. The Cosmopolitan 199
12. The Open Conspirator 221
13. A Personal Interpretation 237

APPENDICES:

I. A Note on Student Writings and *The Time Machine* 259
II. A Note on Dickensian Parallels 268

BIBLIOGRAPHY of Books and Articles Used and Quoted .. 271

INDEX 279

ILLUSTRATIONS

PORTRAITS OF H. G. WELLS:

Today ..... FRONTISPIECE
The Science Student (1886) 54
Middle Twenties (1892) 54
The Rising Author (1901) 130
Success (1911) 178

FACSIMILES AND SKETCHES:

"Incidents in the Lives of Great Men" (1886) (from a letter to the late A. T. Simmons).... 57
"I am in London seeking work" (1888) (from a letter to the same) 75
A Martian (inscribed in Mr. Ralph Straus's copy of "The War of the Worlds") 107
"Having a look at the Machine" (1897) (from a letter to Prof. A. M. Davies) 119
"Your lines are so damned good" (two pages from letter to Mr. Arnold Bennett, 1909) ... 136
"Arthur Kipps, Esq.," (inscribed in Mr. Straus's copy) 163

INTRODUCTION

THE REAL name of "Geoffrey West" is Geoffrey H. Wells. He is no relation of mine. He is the son of a Cardiff business man, there is no family link whatever between us, but I think the close resemblance between the names G. H. Wells and H. G. Wells gave his early literary ambitions and interests a turn in my direction, that otherwise they would not have taken. He read most of my books and compiled a very full and excellent bibliography of all my writings, a bibliography far beyond their merits. He came along to me to look up various particulars and he was good enough to stay with me for a time and catalogue my library. He was beginning to write stories and newspaper articles and we found a common inconvenience in the easy confusion of our names, an inconvenience that the name of my eldest son, G. P. Wells, who was beginning to write at that time in the *Granta,* did nothing to diminish. G. H. W. agreed to our priority in the matter of the surname and after some consideration informed me that he had begun to use the pen-name "Geoffrey West." He said he had hit upon it after reading Keyserling's "Travel Diary" and to it he adheres. It becomes better known every year in the world of English literary criticism.

Recently he approached me with a proposal to write the present biography. Publishers, it seemed, were ready to commission such a book; there was a public for it. He wanted to make it, with my consent and assistance, a very exact and complete book. I do not see myself why the particulars of an author's life need be recorded. Authors scribble away and the events of their lives occur on afternoons off and other odd times; as a rule they do not lead careers of much significance outside their mental adventures. Still, if books about the authors of books are to be written, it is just as well that they should be accurate, even in their unimportant particulars. I knew that Geoffrey Wells would not add another to those discouraging little volumes, now so popular, in which some able critic produces a "study" of his victim after a hasty encounter with some half dozen of his works and supplements it with a scrap or so of hearsay biography. I could trust him to be clear, thorough and indefatigably painstaking. There was something of a compliment therefore in his proposal. If he thought it worth while carrying out, it would have been monstrously self-important and sham modest to refuse him my friendly offices. After all, in a few years now there will have to be my obituary notices—even the *Times* and *Morning Post* and *Daily Mail* will have to inter me somehow—and some kind of record of me may even dwindle down the Encyclopædias of the coming years for a while before the general editor writes the final word "Omit."

So I have given "Geoffrey West" all the assistance in my power and his investigations have been exemplary. He has routed about among my early years and some of the results have been quite amusing. I have never given my past very much attention and for a time, through some mix-up of dates, there was a whole "lost year" for which I was unable

to account. Alas! it was only a mix-up of dates. How delightful it would have been if slowly he could have disinterred and unfolded and restored to me, a forgotten year of youth!

I have kept nothing back from him of any importance and if he has kept anything back from the public that is a matter of his own discretion. I have lived in fair accordance with my convictions and if I am troubled by remorse for certain things I have done, they are things so trivial by the ordinary standards and by any reasonable standards, that even I cannot explain why they can still be sometimes almost excruciating to recall; hard, wounding things I have said to people, particularly people who are now dead, the way I once hit at and did not kill a rat and had to go on killing it, and other things on that scale. "Geoffrey West" skates over no mysteries and has no inner conflict to reveal in my reasonably active, open and cheerful life.

I have agreed to look through the typescript of this book for any slip in the facts. But I stop at the facts. I say not a word about his critical estimate. He must forgive my saying it, but that does not interest me. It goes as he has written it. As I write I have not even seen it. I shall read it but I shall not meditate upon it. So far as I am concerned I find that thinking about the qualities of my work and my place in the literary world, or the world at large, an unwholesome and unprofitable employment. I have been keenly interested in the discussion of a number of questions, I have been a haphazard and pampered prophet, I have found it amusing and profitable to write stories and—save for an incidental lapse or so—I have never taken any very great pains about writing. I am outside the hierarchy of conscious and deliberate writers altogether. I am the absolute antithesis of Mr. James Joyce. That does not prevent our being very good

friends, but our work is poles asunder. Long ago, living in close conversational proximity to Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer, I escaped from under their immense artistic preoccupations by calling myself a journalist. To that title I adhere. This world, says Sir James Jeans, is going on for a million million years. I wave the striving immortals onward, and step aside. Sir J. C. Squire doubts if I shall "live" and I cannot say how cordially and unreservedly I agree.

H. G. Wells

BOOK ONE

THE MAN IN THE MAKING

1866-1895

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CHAPTER ONE

THE BOY

§ 1

TO RELATE in a spirit of frank sincerity the life-story of any personality so vital as H. G. Wells is itself an adventure. Not only has he as author and as man done so many of the things he should have done and should have left undone, but he has passed in the review of his experience almost the whole social vista, excepting only its two least interesting and least necessary elements—our hereditary poor and our hereditary aristocracy. His friends have come from all classes—even from these—and in his diversified writings he has probably commented upon more vital topics than any other writer of his day. Naturally he has aroused opposition and distaste, and in this connection a story is told of a dinner at which a popular novelist and critic ventured to speak about Wells's work to the members of an exclusive and staunchly conservative club. He was listened to—politely—but the feeling of the audience appeared when one quite old man rose to recall his own rather remote connection with the subject of the speaker's remarks. In 1864 he had played against the West Kent Cricket Club, and as he bowled to a Kentish professional named Joseph Wells a swift ball sprang up from the rough pitch and hit the batsman on the head, felling him. The hastily summoned doctor was dubious, portending even fatal consequence, but the man soon recovered, to become, two years later, the father of young Herbert George Wells. Today, he concluded, when

he read Mr. Wells's books and considered his ideas, he really did not know whether to be glad or regretful that his ball had not ended the career of Joseph Wells then and there.

In that story are intimated most of the known facts of Wells's ancestry. Of his grandparents he confesses almost complete ignorance. They were all dead when he was born, his parents' youngest child, into a class normally too occupied with the hazards of today to preserve more than a hearsay knowledge of yesterday. His mother's father was George Neal, a Midhurst inn-keeper of Irish family who in early days supplied horses for the Portsmouth coaches. His paternal grandfather, Joseph Wells senior, was head-gardener to Lord de Lisle at Penshurst Castle in Kent more than a hundred years ago; of him we learn only that he excelled at the growing of roses. The wives are not even named.

The parents, however, are much more substantial figures. The younger Joseph Wells was born on July 14th, 1828, presumably in a gardener's cottage on the Penshurst estate, and in due course trained to his father's profession. For a while he worked at Redleaf for another Joseph Wells (no relative), a man of wealth and position. In the early 'fifties he was engaged by Miss Featherstonhaugh of Uppark, near the village of Harting in Sussex, and there met Sarah Neal, who after previous service had become Miss Featherstonhaugh's personal maid in 1850. She was five years his senior. In 1853 her parents died within a few weeks of each other, the inn was sold, and on November 22nd she and Joseph Wells married in London. For a while they lived at Shuckborough, where their first child, Fanny, was born in 1855 (she died of appendicitis in 1864). In 1855 he gave up gardening to become a shopkeeper in Bromley in Kent, then an isolated village on the outskirts of London. He had relatives already living there. George Wells, his father's cousin, had opened a china and glassware business in 1844 at 47 High Street; another cousin, Thomas Wells, owned a nearby grocery shop. Joseph purchased the former. He kept it open

for thirty-three years, and then gave it up only under compulsion, yet it was never a profitable investment, and survived precariously and by reason of subsidies mainly from its proprietor's cricket earnings.

Fortunately he was a better cricketer than tradesman—an extraordinarily fast round-arm bowler. Not uncommonly he would smash the stumps and send the pieces flying with a ball. Cricket was indeed his passion as well as his salvation, the love of it born in him as a young man, when after a day's work in the garden he would run many miles for an hour's practice before twilight, and continuing to the day of his death. He played as a professional for the West Kent Club from 1857 to 1869, for Bickley Park from 1870 until 1872, and Chislehurst in 1873 and 1874, representing Kent itself in 1862 and 1863. It was on June 26th, 1862, that he bowled himself into cricketing annals by taking, for the first time in county cricket, four wickets with consecutive balls in a match between Kent and Sussex at Brighton. For pure love of sport he and a local police-constable re-established the Bromley Cricket Club, and on the field behind the White Hart Inn gave to teaching the game to local lads many an hour that should have been devoted to business. He had always, his eldest son says, a good heart for the tented field. Sometimes "the missus" would be left in charge, sometimes he would hang a notice on the door to say where he might be found; it is recollected that one day a flock of sheep wandered into the shop in his absence, to create no less havoc among the crockery than the proverbial bull.

Yet if sport took from the shop the attention it needed, it was by sport that it lived. At the beginning of the season the proprietor would advertise in the local paper:

CRICKET! CRICKET! CRICKET!

Joseph Wells has an excellent selection of all goods requisite for the noble game, are of first class quality and moderate prices. His cane-handled Bats specially

selected by himself are acknowledged to be unsurpassed in the trade. Youths' Bats of all sizes, &c., &c., at his

OLD ESTABLISHED CHINA AND GLASS WAREHOUSE,
High Street, Bromley, Kent.

The china and glass became less and less important: bats and balls were the staple trade—bats and balls which Joseph Wells himself seldom paid for. The Dukes at Sevenoaks, well-known makers of cricketing materials, were his cousins, and as a younger man he had saved one of the family from drowning. Thus gratitude opened the way to obtaining goods on credit, and the recurrent crises in the affairs of the little business were, as often as not, settled by a tacit remission of the outstanding Duke debt. Until a generation arose which knew not Joseph....

For thirty years Joe Wells was a ubiquitous and popular figure in Bromley, with his ruddy sun-burnt complexion, short crisp beard, curling grey hair, and jovial bearing. He lingers in peoples' memories as dictatorial, having decided opinions and acting upon them, and altogether overshadowing his small and much more "genteel" wife. Children on their way to school in the mornings would see him beating the doormats and holding forth to next-door neighbours in argument so energetic that he seemed about to come to blows. It is significant that many recall him as a large man, though he was of only medium height. Some of his more notable oddities were sketched by his son in *The Veteran Cricketer,* but the subject of that early essay, one must insist, is no more Joseph Wells than is the father of Remington in *The New Machiavelli.* Wells has never portrayed his father with precision, and the truth lies somewhere in the wide field between these two. For if there was in Joseph a touch of the village worthy, there was too a strain of intelligent curiosity. He had a taste for reading, and bought books cheaply at country sales, so that the home offered, unusually for a lower-class household, a considerable if miscellaneous collection of books

to attract and stimulate the child mind. Altogether it is not difficult to see in him signs of that enterprising individuality which finds various expression in all his sons. He, no more than they, fitted willingly into the common round of village or small town life.

Mrs. Joseph Wells was, one suspects, much more at home. Like her husband, this small, quiet, gentle woman, with her always kindly manner, her serious expression, and her voice as subdued and colourless as her dress, has never been sketched faithfully in her son's books, for those aspects of her which appear in the mothers of George Ponderevo and Remington are skilfully blended with characteristics which she lacked. Yet if she had little of the sternness of Mrs. Ponderevo, it seems probable that she had much of her respectful acceptance of the established order. Her Low Church theology was, Wells says, perfectly sound; only her too kindly heart caused her to paste strips of stamp-paper over pictures of the Devil in the copy of Sturm's *Reflections* which formed part of the boys' regular Sunday reading. It was because she wished her sons to have a more "respectable" education than the National School was supposed to afford that they were sent to a local "Academy." Again, she had the three of them put to the drapery trade as the best of all the politer occupations open to them. Clerkships she evidently deemed beyond the range of a shopkeeper's children, but drapers' assistants similarly wore the black coats and high white collars which were the sure badge of respectability, and gentility was manifest in tone and manner as they bent attentively over polished counters, and besought the pleasure of their patrons' commands. If her sons could not be gentlemen (later in life she would often reflect regretfully "if *only* your father had been a gentleman") they might at least be gentlemanly. Indisputably it was Sarah rather than Joseph Wells whose opposition had to be overcome before her youngest son could break free from the shadow of the destiny she had chosen for him.

§ 2

WELLS came upon the scene at a time of steadily declining prosperity and rising expenses. Just then the local tradesmen round about London were feeling the first effects of the new development of the large multiple stores; they were caught between this unprecedented competition and the rising rates. Joseph Wells had seen his greatest cricketing days in the earlier sixties, and though he was to play for another decade his star was no longer rising. The shop was doing badly, and the two elder boys, Frank (born 1857) and Fred (1862), necessitated increasing expenditure with no hope of relief for years to come. The prospect was so unpromising that at one time preparations were afoot for emigration to America—even to the purchase of a stout oak box—and probably only his mother's illness prevented the birth of the subject of this book as an American.

Instead, as the local paper duly announced, he was born on September 21st, 1866, about the middle of the afternoon, in the small bedroom over the shop at 47 High Street, ushered into the world by Mrs. Emma Harvey, the local midwife. The house was one of a number in the High Street, tall mid-Victorian brick buildings, with shops built in on the ground floor and awkward staircases and dark, cavernous basements. Wells has vividly described his first perceptions of this building and the world about it, recalling the underground kitchen with its window looking up to a grating through which he was wont to regard with a minute interest the boots of passers-by; the back garden with a grape-vine growing out by a dust-bin; the red-papered room upstairs with its bookcase; the shop with the dusty fixtures, the rows and piles of tumblers, jugs, jam-pots, plates and cups, the much more attractive pads and balls and stumps. From the upper windows he could look out at the front upon the High Street, at the back on the tailor's garden and the butcher's yard with its smoking

offal, or, beyond, the churchyard and the church tower. There were, as he grew older, walks hither and thither beyond the town, to Bromley Common, to Keston, or on Sunday afternoons, wearing a little black peaked cap and a short frock with embroidered frill, hand in hand with a neighbour's two small daughters, to the children's services held at Shortlands Church, for his mother lost no time in seeking to inculcate a spirit of true religious devotion.

His first exploit was, at the age of a year or so, to roll off the family sofa on to a glass feeding-bottle, and cut himself so badly above the right eye that the scar remains to this day. Perhaps it helps to account for the animosity with which, at the age of three and a half, sitting on a table in his little frock with the short puffed sleeves, he regards the camera. His plump round features, framed in long girlish hair, are notably neither pretty nor even pleasing: there is more than a suggestion of sulkiness in the set eyes and firm lips. Wells has never liked being photographed.

He was, says his brother Frank, a healthy and masterful child from the first; "woe betide if toys his highness wanted were denied him." If not spoilt, he was evidently petted as youngest children are apt to be, and he early displayed amusing gifts and mannerisms which attracted to him the attentions of the older girl cousins of the Tom Wells household. His memory was especially good, and he could always win applause for his childish recitations. His drawings too were highly appreciated, though they often shocked his mother, for from the first his mind took a critical, not to say unorthodox, turn. He was sent for a while, at the age of five or six, to a small dame's school kept by a Mrs. Knott at 8 South Street, then to Morley's Academy at 74 High Street, where his brothers had preceded him. Morley, over a glass of whisky in the Bell Hotel of an evening, more than once remarked to Joe Wells that that was a smart lad of his. In 1873 and 1874 the cricketer would take the boy to Chislehurst when playing there at

the Club ground, and one day young Bertie found a piece of chalk and on convenient tree-trunks held the first and only public exhibition of his art; his efforts led one of the "gentlemen" to suggest that the kid really had a gift for sketching, and thenceforward the proud father's faith in his son's ability was not to be shaken. Therefore, when in 1874 Bertie was tossed up and dropped by a bigger boy, and consequently had to spend some weeks in bed with a fractured shin-bone, Joseph brought him books from the Bromley Institute, and in one way and another did everything possible to stimulate and widen his youthful imagination. The bone was set badly by the local doctor, and had to be rebroken and set again. Evidently the victim's health was not too good at this time, for there was talk in the town as to how so delicate a child would stand the shock of the crude operation. His yells, his brother notes, were terrific! For more than a year he could take no part in the active games of his playmates, and consequently developed and ever after maintained that reading habit he has declared "such an extraordinary help and stimulus to a youngster of the lower middle class in struggling out from that depressing level."[1] In later years he referred to this fall as one of the luckiest events of his life.

He remained with Morley for another half-dozen years, but apart from their relation as teacher and pupil Thomas Morley would demand some comment. No one, having once come in contact with him, has forgotten him; he remains vivid and monstrous in his pupils' minds after sixty years, a Dickensian eruption into the quiet High Street of Bromley. Wells will have no portraits ascribed to him. He makes it clear that in some of his books this early life is used but never truthfully presented. "Whenever it was convenient to vary it for the story, that was done. For example, the big house in *Tono-Bungay* is Uppark, but the house-keeper is quite different from my mother. Early Bromley is in *The New Machiavelli*: but again the parents

[1] *My Lucky Moment.*

are different. So with Mr. Britling's house." Nevertheless in Mr. Polly's schoolmaster, in the still less palatable Mr. Woodrow into whose heedless hands Kipps was delivered, and even more definitely in the eccentric Mr. Sandsome whose "phases" are recorded in *Certain Personal Matters,* we have reminiscences, not essentially distorted, of Morley himself.

Morley had come to Bromley as usher at an old-established local school, and when this closed in 1849 he saw his opportunity to set up in the profession for himself, promising in the local paper "Writing in both plain and ornamental style, Arithmetic logically, and History with special reference to ancient Egypt." By the 'seventies he was, like Joe Wells, a considerable figure in Bromley life. He was on the Local Board which then ruled the town, and an added lustre came to him from his presumed influence at the College of Preceptors, of which he was a Licentiate and member of the Council. Wells has described him in an early educational article as "a man of commanding urbanity, florid, portly with the portentous portliness of an encyclopedia, taking his ideals, it was suspected, largely from the great Dr. Samuel. He used 'Sir' abundantly in conversation, and also as an instrument of discipline in school." [1] Always he wore the recognised uniform of his profession: silk hat, black coat, white tie, and ample display of shirt front. Every evening he would condescend to join the gathering of local tradesmen at the Bell Hotel, and there he would assume, with churchwarden pipe and whisky and water, the intellectual leadership of the group. An irascible, sarcastic Scotchman, he dealt with these men as with his pupils, crushing their hapless excogitations with irrelevant pedantries. "Punctually at half-past-ten he would wish the assembled company good night, and walk with hands folded behind him up the silent High Street, as solemn in his manner as if he were a pompous plume-adorned funeral,

[1] *Academy for Young Gentlemen.*

instead of a single citizen simply going home to bed." [1]

He was in fact a scholar principally in the village inn. To his pupils—day boys mostly—he appeared as a large choleric man, grimly bewhiskered. The schoolroom was a wooden structure built out over a scullery behind his house. Of a morning the pupils would hang their caps and coats in this scullery, and clatter up the steep stairs to the schoolroom above. There they were under observation, for Morley's bedroom window looked in at them, and by slightly raising his blind he could play the spy. Then suddenly bursting in he would proclaim: "Order, gentlemen, is heaven's first law" and administer penalties for such breaches as he had just observed. It was with the cane, or its equivalent of nose and ear tweaking, blows across the head with a ruler, and even more individual modes of punishment, that he dominated. The cane hung always just to hand from the gas bracket above the high desk, and, Wells says, it hung uncertainly. Sometimes he would conceive a dislike for one boy, who became thereupon the special victim of his terrifying outbursts of temper: one of these unfortunate youths suffered so frequently that his name became a synonym for the hand even for Morley himself—"Hold out your Johnson, Sir!" He developed a curious taste in expletives and when hard pressed by exasperation would resort to a "terrible hard breathing and grinding of the teeth." Then "You *mis*—erable wobblers, you *sniv*elling chumblepúmpennis—come up here, Wiggle-Waggle-Wilson, come up here, you HOUND, and hold out your hand!" [2]

Altogether he was a schoolmaster whom Dickens would have loved to draw rather than a teacher in any modern sense, for though his list of subjects was now a long one, there was actually little or no effective tuition. Wells has more than once in recent years gone out of his way to refer to Morley as a teacher of some ability, but the weight of evidence suggests that when one has declared him whole-

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Ibid.*

some and honest to the extent that he really felt his dignity, and that his temper and ignorance were natural and not wilfully assumed, one has said all that can be said for him. A letter written by Wells to Mr. J. V. Milne in 1892 seems to me decisive; in it he declared with asperity and resentment that such schooling left even intelligent men (he instanced particular cases) unable in later years to "write a decent letter, tackle such a problem as $11\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$, make a sketch of anything, understand a geographical reference, or realise any but the simplest literary description. I do not remember any teaching at all at school. We had lessons set and sums to do, and then they were heard. But our loss was chiefly negative—we grew up dull. The boarders sleeping two in a bed, and left to themselves in the most foolish and wicked fashion, were not so fortunate I know."

All the boys sat together in one room, and Morley, save for bursts of ill-directed energy in the early morning and late afternoon, was mostly content to keep order. He found the days as long as did his pupils. What they actually learned of method was by a kind of tradition passed surreptitiously down from the older to the younger boys. For the rest "we used to draw on our slates, tell one another fantastic stories, trade in stamps, play games with marbles, eat sweets and tarts, and bread and butter, while the process of our education was in active progress."[1] How utterly lacking they were in any sense of discipline or purpose appeared whenever Morley was called out of the room. Then all gave themselves up to the joyous "manufacture of shindy": "Timid boys sat in their places and yelled and baa'd, bolder ones flung books and crumpled paper hither and thither, our leaders and heroes met in battle and rolled one another on the dusty floor"—until Morley's sudden return "smote down the hubbub at its climax into awful silence."[2] Years afterwards Wells recalled the din and dusty smell as among his happiest memories, and wondered whether boys in better

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] *Ibid.*

schools had such fun. Though there were no good traditions, he felt, still they were free from bad ones. The papers they read—the *Boys of England* and the like—stimulated their imaginations in a way essentially healthy; if their fun was coarse it was not salacious.

There was in these days a snobbish rivalry between the Academy and National School boys, whose respective nicknames of Morley's Bulldogs and the Bromley Water-Rats curiously parallel the Baker's Bulldogs and Troy Town Rats of Dickens's schooldays. Naturally the boys were bitter enemies, and at times engaged in pitched street-battles with weapons—stones slung in scarves—more deadly than their wielding can have been.

Young Bertie took little part in such affairs. He is remembered—largely no doubt in consequence of his accident—as something of a "mother's boy," young for his age, at any rate physically. His own recollection of himself as precocious, untidy, amiable, and poor at games does not essentially contradict this. His polite manners drew upon him the patronage of Mrs. and Miss Morley, and through their influence Wells probably did receive the best of what little tutoring was available in the school. A photograph taken at the age of nine is non-committal. Dressed in knickerbockers, short open coat, and white schoolboy collar, he sits with folded arms resting upon a table. He is not good looking; the eyes are too small, the lips irregular. A clever boy, it might be thought, but reserved, defensive; one traces both the knowingness and the caution of the Cockney.

It was rather Frank Wells who was the hero of street-battles and classroom combats alike, and who seems to have displayed while his brother was still in the nursery such truly Wellsian qualities of imagination that his father as an old man expressed wonder at H. G.'s fertility of ideas, but added: "Now if Frank had thought of them . . .!" In fact it was Frank who gave his brother the idea of *The War of the Worlds*. His old friends recall him as the daring and adventurous leader of a wild "gang" of half-a-dozen boys:

a youth of mechanical dexterity and extraordinary inventiveness. It was his self-appointed task to war against tedium. Bromley one day seemed unbearably quiet, whereupon he and his lieutenants prepared a bomb which they placed in an elm tree in the cricket field. They lit the train and bolted. A few shattering seconds later the whole town was abuzz with excitement and inquiry, and Frank was happy again. "But oh! what larks we had," writes one of that gang, Mr. William Baxter, now a respected citizen and local historian. "In that day they were only regarded as larks: now you would be termed young blackguards and sent to a reformatory." He continues: "In any exploit our allegiance was given to Frank's orders only, and Master Bertie was regarded as a youngster. If he came with us he would have to get Frank's permission, and I never remember it being granted!" Frank escaped the reformatory to be apprenticed to a local draper; today he lives in his father's old house at Liss in Hampshire. Of Fred, the second son, little need be recorded except that he too became a shop-assistant, and had later a fortunate career in South Africa.

But for all his quietness Master Bertie was not wasting his time. If he learnt little at school he read much at home and at the local Literary Institute in the then New Town Hall. He had had no children's books except the masculine and admirable *Struwwelpeter,* but in his father's miscellaneous collection he read at large. Here he first encountered Washington Irving. Humboldt's *Cosmos* he recalls as especially memorable. Here too he read *Middlemarch* and Chaucer, Grote's *History of Greece* and some of Hume—stiff going for a boy so young. Scott's novels bored him, but he liked the poetry, and learnt much of *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake* by heart. Then there were Captain Cook's *Travels,* and "a fascinating middle eighteenth-century atlas with abounding Terræ Incognitæ." "On Sundays mother insisted upon the Bible, but Sturm's *Reflections* and Clarke's *New Testament* with its footnotes sowed the seeds of an early scepticism. Some Shakespeare he read at school, but not

much of him otherwise; all of Dickens that was not at home he found at a cousin's home, and the pictures in a Wood's *Natural History* possessed by that same cousin gave him an inkling of evolution and a nightmare terror of gorillas." [1]

But apart from books he was acutely curious as to everything about him. Bromley was at this time in the first stage of that swift incessant growth which followed the coming of the railway. The High Street in his infancy was still the quiet main thoroughfare of a placid country town on the London-Hastings road, but between 1866 and 1871 the local population almost doubled, and by 1880 the character of the place had changed completely. It developed and spread mainly at the whim of the speculative builder, careless of design or co-ordination. New red-brick buildings, trenches for drains and pipes, embankments and cuttings for the railway to the north, drove like rough scabs across the countryside, wiping out the familiar beauty of the Ravensbourne river meadows (the first birthplace of his imagination) as conclusively as a giant's footmark. He watched these latest developments of Victorian progress with wonder and dismay.

Already he was seeking a means of expression, yet though he early acquired proficiency in verse he really began with drawing, and during school hours would tell in pictures long spirited sagas for the chum who sat beside him, a boy of eccentric abilities whom Wells was to meet again after an interval of nearly twenty years. Especially fascinating to the young draughtsman were the bound volumes of *Punch* brought home by his father from the Institute, and upon these he modelled his art, producing a whole series of ephemeral manuscript magazines in imitation.

It was towards the end of the 'seventies that the family found itself in inescapable difficulties. In 1877 Joseph Wells slipped and fell while pruning the grape-vine in his back garden one Sunday morning (a judgment upon him, it

[1] *Introduction to Atlantic Edition.*

was said in the town, for not being at church). A broken leg made play as a professional cricketer thenceforth impossible, and thus seriously diminished his income. Clearly the shop could not support the family, though Frank and Fred were now apprenticed. Bertie, it was decided, must follow his brothers at the earliest possible moment. He left school in June 1880, to go at once to Windsor for his first trial as draper's apprentice. Another few weeks, and he might have had a better chance, for in August Miss Featherstonhaugh, always interested in her former maid (she had given little Fanny Wells many pleasant holidays at Uppark), offered the grateful Mrs. Wells a post as housekeeper. Wells returned to Bromley only for brief holiday visits to his father, who kept on the shop until 1888, when he was forced into retirement by the strategy of his landlords, a firm of shopkeepers who, needing the premises, allowed the rent to accumulate, issued a Distress Warrant, and so turned him out upon his failure to pay. He went to live at Liss, where his son was in business, and there, joined presently by his wife, remained until his death in 1910.

To the last he took the greatest interest in the writings of his son, even when he could not accept their preachments. *Ann Veronica* he hoped would prove a guide to teach "young ladies what to avoid." Of *Tono-Bungay* he wrote cogently, and with an evident relish: "People will tear H.G. to pieces some day: he is only just beginning to thrash into everybody."

§ 3

From 1880 onwards for nearly four years Wells's principal struggle was against his mother's determination to make him a draper, that summit of her ambition. Probably it seemed to her then that of the three boys Herbert would best accord with her hopes. He had visited Windsor before, spending holidays with an uncle who kept first the

Royal Oak Hotel by the South Western Railway Station and later the now extinguished Surley Hall below Monkey Island. Some of the better-class customers had been amused and interested by his eager intelligence, and he had come a great deal into contact with them. Ellen Terry and Henry Irving visited the hotel while he was there, and spent some time talking to him. He was quick to pick up new ways and words, and there were two girl cousins who attended to his manners; the improved example of polite behaviour he exhibited upon each successive return to Bromley plainly irritated his less amenable brothers.

But there was more in being a draper than met the eye, as there was, indeed, in young Herbert. He may not have resented the change from school to shop—for the first day or two. The idea of abandoning education to earn a living is attractive to most boys of thirteen, until it ceases to be an idea and becomes experience. He cannot have kept his illusions long. Those were the days when drapers were drapers, and very little else; in his own professional phrase, they *lived* only on the selvage of their days. Not for another twelve years was the Shop Hours Act to limit the working of young persons to seventy-four hours a week. He was in the shop some thirteen hours a day, and a half day meant closing at five o'clock. A boy of his age might just as well have been in prison (or a blacking factory), and it was the happiest of releases when, at the end of the trial month, Messrs. Rogers & Denyer rejected him as, he says, unsuitable for their high trade. "Untidy and troublesome" summed up their opinion of him, and very likely it was justified, for the first quality was congenital in him, and for the rest he had quite lost any ambition or interest in the business. He wanted to get back to his books.

There was a brief respite. He was sent to Wookey in Somerset, where his mother's cousin was sole master at the National School. This Mr. Williams had been a teacher in the West Indies, acquired certificates, come to England, worked for a firm of scholastic providers, and presently

gravitated by the weight of his certificates to this present post. In the previous December Wells had won the Second Class Certificate of the College of Preceptors with some distinctions, and the plan was that Cousin Williams should coach him into the pupil-teacher stage, and insinuate him as such into the Wookey school. But less than three months had passed when some busybody discovered that the elder's certificates, however sufficient in the West Indies, had no currency here, and he, and Herbert with him, had to pack up and be gone.

Wells was at Uppark for Christmas, and amused himself, when snow and bad weather confined him to the house for several days, by producing yet another manuscript magazine, *The Uppark Alarmist.* It lived up to its sensational title in illustrations and text and ran to seven or eight issues, to the tolerant amusement of the large staff of servants.

Already he had looked up from an underground kitchen and seen people as boots walking, had as a shopkeeper's son been made acutely conscious of the social hierarchies of small town life, and as an academy pupil scorned the better-taught boys who attended the National School. Now, from the housekeeper's room in a great mansion, he came into intimate contact with the even more intensive snobbery of the servants' hall. The etiquette was quite extraordinarily strict, as George Ponderevo found in *Tono-Bungay,* a book which contains, in its account of Bladesover, admitted memories of this aspect of life at Uppark. (Surely Mrs. Mackridge, who painted hair upon her bald forehead in front of her dignified cap, must be an authentic recollection!) Here was a world where everyone, great or small, had his or her place, and was expected to stay in it. "Above you were your betters, below you were your inferiors, and there were even an unstable questionable few, cases so disputable that you might, for the rough purposes of everyday at least, regard them as your equals." [1]

[1] *Tono-Bungay.*

The scale was careful and precise, from "her leddyship" and "company" above stairs, down by way of the vicarage people, the doctor, the tenantry, the butler and the housekeeper to the scarcely distinguishable ranks of the inferior villagers. It was a world into which Wells could never fit; from the first he had his doubts, and that was blasphemy. The interminable talk of titles and tips and precedence simply bored him, and, like George Ponderevo, he jeered in his heart.

Yet Uppark, all in all, meant a tremendous widening of his outlook. Simply to come to so huge a household from the lower middle-class homes which were all he had known was in itself an experience, and here, too, he realised first the beauty of the open countryside and of the ordered park with its great lawns, its woods and bracken, its deer and flowers and trees. There was an artificial ruin, the Tower, which still stands out upon the Downs above Uppark House, and here—but this must have been later—he read Plato's *Republic* for the first time, not with great interest yet with an intimation of purposes and horizons wider than any he had glimpsed before.

He read much while at Uppark. Miss Featherstonhaugh, attracted by the "nice" ways of the young boy, allowed him to borrow books from the library. But more to his taste were the sceptical volumes discovered upstairs in an attic, books once the property of Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh, in his earlier days an advanced freethinker, friend of the Prince Regent and incidentally the "discoverer" of Romney's and Nelson's Lady Hamilton. There, alone among the lumber, Wells engrossed himself in Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Common Sense,* the unexpurgated adventures of *Gulliver,* the easy French of Voltaire's works, that "most entrancing book" *Vathek* and translations from Plutarch and Lucretius. A forgotten Gregorian telescope, found there and slowly put together, helped to develop still further the speculative tendencies of his mind. Chilly but enthralled, he made his first survey of that mute and timeless harmony

of the stars and planets which ever since has formed the ultimate background to all his imaginings, and to the magic and wonder of which perhaps no one else of his generation has given more vital and more memorable expression.

This was, however, but an interlude, and soon over. In January 1881 he was tried for apprentice at the chemist's shop of Samuel Evan Cowap, of Church Street, Midhurst, that still picturesque and peaceful Sussex town, some eight or nine miles from Uppark, sketched in *Tono-Bungay* as Wimblehurst. Cowap was a youngish man who found the ties of a one-man business restrictive to his lively social instincts. Unable to afford an assistant, he realised that an apprentice would both provide a helpful premium and give him a greater freedom. He in no way resembled Edward Ponderevo, but Wells does recall that he sold a Cough Linctus which had all the characteristics of *Tono-Bungay* ("an admirable tipple") and from which the idea of that famous remedy developed. Very soon Wells found that his function was no more than to wash bottles and mind the shop; on the one occasion when he did attempt to satisfy a customer's impatience the results were not happy. At the end of the month both he and Cowap came simultaneously to the conclusion that it would be neither to their nor Midhurst's advantage did he continue.

Again a school was chosen as a stop-gap. While working for Cowap and living in lodgings in Midhurst, Wells had had lessons in Latin from Mr. Horace Byatt, M.A., the headmaster of the local Grammar School, who was impressed by the boy's unusual diligence and quickness; and his mother decided that while she was seeing what could be done next he should stay as a boarder with Byatt, and attend the day classes as a pupil. The school, though of seventeenth-century foundation, and enjoying high repute and prosperity for nearly a hundred years, had been closed in 1859, and only recently re-established under the Endowed Schools Act. The re-opening took place on April 12th, 1880, with Byatt as only master, and ten pupils. Wells was pupil

No. 33, entering the school on February 23rd, 1881. The new School House was not yet built, and it was in a pleasant ivy-covered house facing the South Pond, at the other end of the town, that he spent seven cheerful weeks with Byatt and the few other boarders.

What his schoolmates best recall is his propensity for sketching. He would appropriate their books to draw faces, scenes, animals, or illustrations to comic essays. Some boys resented these liberties; his closer friends would incite him to the further exercise of his imagination. The essays were comic histories or very personal biographies. One of the former, *The Battle of Bungeldum* (a schoolboyish piece of nonsense which still survives, and may be mentioned as the earliest composition by Wells I have encountered), came, together with some of the drawings, to Byatt's eyes, and he set the boy to work on an enlarged portrayal of the incident. It stood on an easel in the classroom and occupied some days of careful work, though it was frank burlesque and introduced in one corner the startling adventures of the Cow-Bullock, the boys' name for a bullock which broke loose in the town and was finally roped in the South Pond to the joy and cheers of the excited boarders.

Wells already exhibited those characteristics which mark his relationships with others in his early life. He was a friendly, likable, lively boy, always ready for a "lark" but caring little for games or "gang" activities, and at his best with one or two companions only. Yet it was he who on Founder's Day, March 17th, suggested the paper-chase which was for many years an annual institution.

But his mother could not be brought to abandon her dreams of the drapery. He left the school on April 14th, arrangements were made for him to go on trial to Hyde's Drapery Stores, 9 King's Road, Southsea, in May, and in June he was bound as an apprentice for four years.

He survived his trial period, but he was never a satisfactory assistant. "I suppose if I had had a normal ability to pack parcels and respect my shopwalker I should have

been a draper's assistant all my life. What got me out of the business was nothing but incompetence. I couldn't handle the stuff skilfully, and I couldn't keep bright and attentive for long spells. I can work pretty well in short spells, but then I must knock off for half an hour or so before I can go on, and the staying power of my colleagues filled me with envy and astonishment. To this day the steady good temper and patient alertness of the shop assistant compels my admiration." [1] The fact is that he has always had great nervous energy combined with little muscular energy: interested, he can work continuously with only the briefest respites, but with the least suggestion of tedium he collapses. Routine, repetition, submission to continuous discipline—to all these he was completely antipathetic. Incidentally, he has said that what irked him most was precisely the cultivation of that gentlemanly air, that artificial voice and manner, which his mother so much admired: not only he but all the assistants hated it.

And while the demands made upon him were thus in some ways too great, in others they were altogether too small. Inside the limits of his employment he could achieve only mental exasperation; he had to look elsewhere for satisfaction. He was still reading and speculating with the avidity of a real intellectual hunger, buying second-hand text-books and the periodical parts of *Cassell's Popular Educator,* and lying awake of nights to study them by candlelight. One day an angry shopwalker found him hidden away in a corner of the cellar, reading Herbert Spencer. He kept a little notebook in which he jotted down his rudimentary answers to such problems as "What is matter?" and "What is space?", and even, it is said, debated with himself the ethics of suicide.

In later years he advised the ambitious shop assistant to study his trade conscientiously with an eye to its wider aspects, and to "eschew all frivolous pursuits. Above all let

[1] Letter read at a Shop Assistants' Conference dinner in London, April 16th, 1922.

him avoid dancing classes, Sunday schools, the society of condescending persons of a superior class, the banjo, fiction, and the feminine sex." [1] It was advice which Kipps with a singular faithfulness failed to take, and it is possible that Wells too had his lapses, for once he played cards and got into debt and "went flushed and shrill-voiced to my mother and got the money she could so ill afford to give me." [2]

But primarily he was intent upon study—and escape. Already from his cousin's school, and again while with Byatt, he had realised the increasing facilities for higher education open even to him could he but set his foot on the first upward step, and his determination grew to fight for such freedom. He was indeed actively unhappy. We have in *Kipps* (more than in the happier *Mr. Polly*) a truthful picture of what he endured in those two years of daylong slavery, cheap unwholesome food, discomfort, and the domineering tyranny of ignorant superiors. "That hell of a life" he has called it, and his only respite was to get away on Sundays to Uppark or Godalming, where his two brothers (Frank, always fond of him, would pay his fare) were in lodgings. They too were working under similar conditions, and on their long walks together the main topic of conversation was heartfelt denunciation of the drapery as an old woman's job, no fit work for a man. Wells has written with a considerable bitterness of "the pinch of it all, the intolerable hours, the brutal competition, the many petty tyrannies," and again: "For a wretched couple of years in my boyhood I slept in one of those abominable dormitories, ate the insufficient food supplied and drudged in the shop. Then when I was fifteen I ran away one Sunday morning to my mother, and told her that I would rather die than go on being a draper. That seventeen-mile tramp, without breakfast, to deliver that ultimatum is still very vivid in my memory. I felt then most desperately wicked,

[1] Letter, *Grocers' Assistant*, February 1900.
[2] *First and Last Things.*

and now I know it was nearly the best thing I ever did."[1]

He was actually not fifteen but nearly seventeen, and it is an overstatement to say that he ran away. What he did was to slip off—without breakfast, as he says—one Sunday morning in July or August 1883, and walk, growing ever wearier, more sick with hunger, and more desperate, the many miles over the Downs to Uppark. There he met his mother coming from church. In this connection we have in *Tono-Bungay* one of the few scenes in his books authentically painted from fact:

"Presently, down the hill, the servants appeared, straggling by twos and threes, first some of the garden people and the butler's wife with them, then the two laundry maids, odd inseparable old creatures, then the first footman talking to the butler's little girl, and at last, walking grave and breathless beside old Ann and Miss Fison, the black figure of my mother.

"My boyish mind suggested the adoption of a playful form of appearance. 'Coo-ee, mother!' said I, coming out against the sky, 'Coo-ee!'

"My mother looked up, went very white, and put her hand to her bosom."

His unexpected appearance was a shock, and she was not relieved by his ultimatum that he would drown himself if his indentures were not cancelled. At last she promised to think the matter over, and he was sent hastily back to the shop that same day. He wrote to his father, and to Byatt, saying how unhappy he was, how determined to get out of it at all costs; they were persuaded to take his side and his mother's fears and regrets were overruled. Finally it was Byatt who swung the balance decisively in his favour by offering him a post as teacher in the Preparatory School. The salary was small, but sufficient for a pleasant lodging in the High Street.

He was free at last of the world of shops for ever.

[1] Introduction, *Shop Slavery and Emancipation.*

§ 4

The school was growing rapidly in consequence of Byatt's vigorous enthusiasm. He was an energetic, capable teacher, a large, full-faced man, with a deeply cleft chin, impressive domed forehead beneath receding hair, bright alert eyes, and in the firm lips a hint of both irascibility and humour. The ten scholars were now increased to fifty or sixty, and an assistant master, Harris, was already employed. All the classes were housed in an ugly low-roofed and flat-fronted stone building which, like Lazarus at the rich man's gate, faced the entrance to Cowdray Park with its deer, fine trees, and open stretches of bracken fern. Its interior was originally one large room, but now partitions were set up to provide separate compartments for the Preparatory and Junior and Senior Grammar School boys.

There was still for Wells one minor obstacle to be overcome—at the cost of some personal distress. The School's status under the Endowed Schools Act necessitated his confirmation as a member of the Church of England. As a boy he had attended church fairly regularly with his mother and brothers, but his mother not only concealed the Devil from his eyes, she deemed Hell an improper word; "and so my religious instruction was greatly mitigated, and the God of Hell was never more than a threatening shadow for me. I cannot remember a phase in my life when the idea did not convey something preposterous and incredible to my mind." [1] Then there had been the influence of Hume and Humboldt, the books found at Uppark, the speculations in the drapery; no boy of sixteen can read Spencer's *First Principles* and remain orthodox! Scepticism had developed early and by this time was complete. But the choice now was between acquiescence and casting himself for the fourth time as a burden upon his mother. "The result was that I committed the first humiliating act of my life. I ate doubt

[1] *George Whale: In Memoriam.*

and was confirmed—and lost my personal honour. The Church thus presented itself to me for long as a great stupid thing, which was stifling my conscience and intelligence." [1] For a quarter of a century, he adds, he consistently hated the Church of England, "somewhat without reason and justice, as I have since come to think." In his mood of resentment, the classes in Christian evidences conducted by the local curate only tended to make him a more fervent unbeliever, but he kept silence—and his job. His mother was present at the solemn ceremony, and only then, says Mr. Frank Wells, did she cease to regret the drapery.

Wells at seventeen was a slight, fair young man, with untidy hair and clothes, and a downy chin and upper lip. As a teacher he drove his pupils hard but made them learn. As an individual he was, as always, reserved but friendly, quickly attracting people to him once contact was made. Occasionally he would play cricket or football with the local teams, but more for exercise than any interest in these games. He made at this period few, and no lasting, friends. His principal comrade was Jack Fish, the boy with whom he had shared a desk at the school in 1881; their favourite amusement during the summer was boating on the Rother, until they disastrously broke an oar, and had to pay for it by painful instalments. Often he would go for walks with one of his pupils, Byatt's eldest son, now Sir Horace Byatt, and give him informal lessons in botany by the way. Some time during the year he wrote and drew—they were principally illustration—two stories for his employer; one ran to some forty or fifty pages, and depicted the adventures of Otto Noxious, explorer, and Munchausen. The other was called *Potted Onions*. He also made his first contribution to the press, in the form of a letter to the *Midhurst Times* on the subject of temperance; he prophesied that with improved social conditions excessive drinking would wane and cease—an early example, he suggests, of his congenital optimism.

[1] Speech at supper of St. Matthew's Guild, 1908.

He was all this while working really hard. It was his good luck, he has said, by which "at fourteen, when so many happy boys are at a public school, I was precipitated by my father's financial troubles into a driving, systematic, incessant draper's shop, and given so bad a time as to stiffen my naturally indolent, rather slovenly, and far too genial nature into a grim rebellion against the world—a spurt of revolt that enabled me to do wonders of self-education before its force was exhausted. If I had been the son of a prosperous gentleman I should never, I am sure, have done anything at all." [1] Thus he had little leisure, if inclination, for adolescent Lewisham-like encounters with girls; if any such took place they were slight and passing. Sexually, he says, he had himself well in hand then and during all the years afterwards; he was too keen to get on to waste his time or in any way involve himself. He occupied while in Midhurst precisely that little front bedroom, with its slanting ceiling, its lead-framed, diamond-paned dormer windows, its bulging walls, and its view of the vicarage garden opposite, where Lewisham lived and Hoopdriver too slept while pursuing his romantic quest through Sussex. Perhaps a reflection of the character of his landlady, Mrs. Walton, lightly sketched, is to be found in both *The Wheels of Chance* and *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, but though Wells has admitted that the Midhurst school was in mind when he sketched the Whortley Proprietary School, still, just as Wells is not Lewisham, so Byatt must not be identified with Bonover, nor Harris with Dunkerley. It is, says Wells, a stale Victorian delusion that people are, or can be, "put into books."

Byatt had quickly proved himself a man of enterprise by initiating under the South Kensington Science and Art Department scheme evening classes in which Wells was the solitary student. The master would sit aloft in his high desk correcting the day school exercises, the boy below in silent study of a text-book, and so the quantum of necessary

[1] *My Lucky Moment.*

attendances was made up. The period over, the pupil would return to the more familiar status of assistant master, and they would go together into the garden to survey before supper those marvellous sunsets which all that autumn of 1883 were the aftermath of the Krakatoa eruption. It was Wells's first opportunity to investigate systematically the isolated problems he had puzzled over by candle-light in the drapery dormitory, and he grasped it so eagerly—his mind had clearly taken a scientific turn from Uppark or even from Bromley days—that he won easily any number of those "bluish green certificates" which adorned Mr. Lewisham's walls, passing in the annual May examinations with many "firsts" and bringing Byatt his reward in grants. So encouraging were these successes that Wells applied for a scholarship to go as a teacher-in-training to the Normal School of Science at South Kensington, and *his* reward came to him, as to Lewisham, in the shape of "a marvellous blue document from the Education Department promising inconceivable things. He was to go to London and be paid a guinea a week for listening to lectures—lectures beyond his most ambitious dreams! Among the names that swam before his eyes was Huxley—Huxley and then Lockyer!" [1] Byatt may have been a little disconcerted to find his grant-earner thus taken from him with much of the golden vein still unworked, but he took the success in good part. They remained friendly, and Wells sent Byatt a number of his earlier books as they appeared.

Thus it was that in the summer of 1884, after a year at Midhurst, Wells first went to live in London, a Cockney Adam out of a Sussex Eden, all the world before him from which to choose the future sphere of his activity and conquest.

[1] *Love and Mr. Lewisham.*

CHAPTER TWO

THE STUDENT

§ 1

THE very first September morning at South Kensington witnessed one incident which, though minor and passing, might be taken to symbolise Wells's academic progress there. He turned out of Exhibition Road and through the wrought-iron gateway into the hall of the Normal School of Science with perhaps as much of shyness and awe as he ever felt. Here indeed was the fountainhead of knowledge, the birthplace of that great scientific career he optimistically planned; his one desire was to begin. Eagerly he followed little Grummett, the hall porter, through the noisy tumult of the senior students' reunions, and was sent crawling slowly upward in the old-fashioned hydraulic lift to the biological laboratories on the top floor. There he missed his way, and wandered questingly into a preparation room from which he was hastily expelled, but soon was seated at his bench in the high, narrow laboratory with its tall windows looking magnificently out over London, as far, on a clear day, as the heights of Hampstead.

He opened his book, and sought to study as one who would lose no time, but the other students, men and girls, continually entering, greeting each other, moving about the room, were too great a distraction, and took most of his attention.

The lesson began, and soon the still warm and twitching bodies of unfortunate rabbits lay on the benches await-

ing dissection. Wells was intent upon his task, when suddenly a pair of drab spatterdashes swam into his lowered vision, and he looked up to behold for the first time in the flesh—his hero, the great Professor Huxley. He was standing, Wells says, with his hands plunged deep in his pockets, "the little nut brown eyes that sheltered deep under his portentous eyebrows" studying the class alertly but disinterestedly. "When I saw him so close, so familiarly present to me, I became excessively agitated with pride, and mighty respect for him. Possibly he might in a moment speak to me, or look at the gory mess before me." [1] Hopeful that he might, fearful lest he should, Wells returned with a kind of tense concentration to his work, cutting eagerly but inaccurately. A moment later he looked up, saw the great man walking leisurely away from him, and relaxed.

That was all... but it was the prophecy in little of three years' work. During the first of these, Huxley, as man and as teacher, was Wells's immediate inspiration. Though they spoke to each other only once, when Wells snatched open the door of the lecture theatre for Huxley, and the latter gravely bade him "Good morning," still he was the only South Kensington professor to whom Wells ever raised his hat! "I do not know if the students of today will quite understand just how we felt for our Dean—we read his speeches, we borrowed the books he wrote, we clubbed out of our weekly guineas to buy the *Nineteenth Century* whenever he rattled Gladstone or pounded the Duke of Argyle. I believed then that he was the greatest man I was ever likely to meet, and I believe that all the more firmly today. And when people ask, 'Were you not at South Kensington in Huxley's time?' I answer, with a vast amount of dishonest implication in my off-handed manner, 'Oh yes, I was one of his men!'" [2] His famous biology course seemed to Wells, who took the subject that year, an education in itself. Forty years later he described it as "a continuing, systematic, illu-

[1] *Huxley.*
[2] *Ibid.*

minating study of life, of the forms and appearances of life, of the way of life, of the interplay of life, of the past of life and the present prospect of life,"[1] and it gave him a permanent faith in biology as the basis of all but the most elementary education. At the time it stimulated him to work, to thought, to eager investigation; in the first Christmas examination in Biology, Part I, Division I, he obtained a first class, dropped to a second in the February Botany test, but for Advanced Zoölogy at the end of the School year took again a first class, as also for Mathematics, though in a lower category. There was no doubt about the renewal of his grant, and the holiday weeks of that hot summer must have passed pleasantly enough at Uppark in the consciousness that the Career was well under way.

The new session, however, brought a change. Huxley had gone; a breakdown in health forced his resignation as Dean and as lecturer—he had turned his back and walked away. Wells relaxed. Thus far the formal aspect of School life had meant almost everything to him; henceforth the informal was to count more and more. The courses in geology and physics under Judd, Lockyer, and others never really captured his imagination, and though at all times he could with a slight effort achieve brilliant results, boredom was creeping in, to such an extent that even his studies for matriculation (taken successfully in January 1886) came as a welcome relief. The essentially discursive nature of his talent was already becoming clear; the very range of his interests betrayed him in the examiners' hands.

§ 2

It was the Debating Society which, in the absence of any interest in sport, gave him his first introduction to the social side of the School life; there he apprehended, as never before, the pleasures of intellectual companionship. The

[1] *Salvaging of Civilization: College, Newspaper and Book.*

students, Dr. A. E. H. Tutton notes, were of many kinds and classes, from public school boys taking special courses, to students-in-training like Wells who lived parsimoniously on their inadequate grants; the Debating Society brought them together on common ground, widened the individual outlook, and created friendships which otherwise would never have come into being. Despite his high-pitched, never attractive speaking voice, Wells soon became both a frequent and most popular speaker—facetious, apt at the swift retort—as his fellow students acknowledged by their banging and clattering of desks when he rose. Unfortunate and yet fortunate, it was said, was the speaker who had him for a critic—for he would draw an audience even if the speaker could not. Nor was he merely a jester; he displayed a marked gift for penetrating analysis and logical exposition. "As a speaker in the Debating Society he never had an equal in my time," recalls Mrs. Bruce, then Elizabeth Healey, a great friend of these early days. "His wit was keen and swift; his sarcasm never wounded the victims of it, for it was tempered with humour and truth. He attacked conventions, shams, and humbugs with all that courage of youth which has never failed him throughout his later life. He loved 'cockshies' and smashing popular beliefs." Wells himself told her in 1888: "Things were given for me to pitch stones at. Sometimes I fancy that is what gives me my profoundest pleasure—to chuck things at things and break them." He was indeed, she continues, a favourite with all the students, for he was "sociable, amusing, friendly, and a most brilliant talker, refreshing and stimulating without ever showing malice or ill-nature." So one finds him, at every stage of his development, attracting the most varied types of men and women by the sheer force and fascination of his personality, and though he has never suffered fools gladly and some have found him at first reserved and even shy, those to whom he warmed have quickly discovered and revelled in his exuberant vitality, his powers as a talker, his extraordinary abilities, not always exercised discreetly,

as a mimic. He was a gawky but not unhandsome young man, slender and pale, with striking blue eyes and thick tumbled brown hair.

Yet if, like Lewisham, he was to seem to fail, it was not Love but Life which tempted him. Friendships he may have had with the Miss Heydingers of his day, even to serious, semi-romantic walks and talks about poetry and conduct and the social system, in the gloom of the lonely Gallery of Old Iron at the South Kensington Art Museum, but his affections were already centred upon the art student who later became his first wife. They were engaged when he was eighteen, but did not marry for some years to come, until he was earning a quite adequate salary as a tutor of biology.

He was elected to the committee of the Debating Society in his first year, but the biology students on the top floor were inclined to keep to themselves. Thus his second year was more notable for its developing friendships, though A. V. Jennings, a vivid and attractive personality, worked in the same laboratory from the first day, and was as a result the first of Wells's friends in the School. It was in the Debating Society that Wells came to know A. E. H. Tutton, Arthur Morley Davies, William Burton, and the late A. T. Simmons. Burton lived near Wells's Euston Road lodging, and they travelled daily together to and from South Kensington. Simmons swiftly became and for many years remained Wells's most intimate companion, the one, Wells said later, but for whose encouragement and practical aid he would have abandoned writing long before he received any intimation of success. R. A. Gregory—now Sir Richard Gregory, the editor of *Nature*—was a friend of Wells's third School year.

These few scattered individuals formed a group, its members planning, working, and still more talking together. They met frequently outside the School. They developed a great interest in pictures and visited the art galleries; they watched Leighton at work on his frescoes in the Victoria and Albert Museum; they went to the exhibition of Watts's

paintings which inspired Wells to a Carlylean prose rhapsody in the school magazine! The South Kensington museums were their happy hunting-grounds, and they did a good deal not only of study but of widely miscellaneous reading in the quiet of the Dvce and Forster Library. The theatre was necessarily a rare luxury for impecunious students—they would, however, battle their way into the cheaper seats for the Gilbert and Sullivan operas—but they became keen politicians, "scampering about London to attend great political meetings, to hear William Morris on Socialism, Auberon Herbert on Individualism, Gladstone on Home Rule, or Bradlaugh on Atheism." [1]

London was clearly working a change in this boy from Midhurst; he was discovering new aims and new potentialities. He was having revealed to him contrasts between a poverty more profound, and a wealth more ostentatious, than any he had realised in his previous experience. On one hand were the great shops, the cabs and carriages with their unconcerned occupants; on the other the starving children, the soup-kitchens and their wretched patrons, the outcasts of the Embankment, the poverty-engrained lives of the unfortunate. Mr. R. H. Gretton in his admirable *Modern History of the English People* sketches the 'eighties as a time when the general structure of social and political life ran on with the deadweight imperturbability of a steam-roller whose driver has gone gently but decisively to sleep. The rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer, and who would say them nay? The middle-eighties in particular, just those years when Wells was in London and first seeing life on this larger scale, witnessed a period of trade depression, of unemployment and unrest. Winter after winter there was rioting, even under the sacred club-windows of Pall Mall, and the police developed a militant brutality in disbanding meetings and processions. The limited liability company and the big multiple store were in their flourishing youth, and the results of these large combinations of capital ap-

[1] *Salvaging of Civilization: College, Newspaper and Book.*

peared in the increasing bankruptcies of smaller men. On the other hand Labour was organising, the trade unions growing in number and membership, the strike becoming a recognised weapon of negotiation. The newly formed Social Democratic Federation was preaching what most people—including the bulk of its members—found indistinguishable from revolution.

But a new spirit was at work. These middle-eighties saw also in a very great number of minds the awakening of an idea of social responsibility. Within the next few years numerous Royal Commissions were to investigate questions of social welfare. The socialist principles of the duty of the State to the individual, and of the individual to the State, received a continually widening acknowledgment, often unconscious. Perhaps little of immediate value was attained, but in many ways the admission was more important than any achievement, and young Wells, looking about him, was deeply impressed. Social responsibility can scarcely ever have been for him a matter of argument; it was an axiom.

Certainly in his environment it needed little reading of books like Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and contemporary pamphlets and periodicals to convert him to the idealistic socialism which just then, widely advertised by the prosecutions of 1885 and 1886, was so very much in the air. It was a militant banner-waving socialism, imagining, in his phrase, that it had only to march about the walls of the Social Jericho blowing its eloquent trumpets. Necessarily he flaunted the aggressive red tie which was then the outward and visible sign of the good socialist.

The development was natural and inevitable. He was, for all these diversions, leading what with ever wider horizons opening about him he felt to be a *mean* existence. His weekly guinea had somehow to be stretched to pay for clothes and fares as well as food and lodging. This meant india-rubber collars to save pennies on the laundry bill, and fourpenny or sixpenny vegetarian lunches which "filled your belly with the east wind and your soul with righteousness."

THE SCIENCE STUDENT (1886)

MIDDLE TWENTIES (1892)

He grew thin and pale to an alarming degree; for three years he had neither sufficient food nor exercise, and his angry resentment at this heavy handicap provided at least the colouring of the mood in which the group of friends went seeking in this and that political party "the resolute nucleus, the little leaven of clear-headed men, that was presently to dominate the country." [1]

William Morris they heard often in the Kelmscott House meeting-hall, but as a socialist leader he was disappointing, however admirable as a man. "Intelligent and emotional adolescence sitting shy but earnest in the back seats slowly forgot its idea of a council of war, and by the end of the meeting was being vastly entertained" by "picturesque personalities" who, prominent in the front seats, exchanged "cheerful cackle," and made speeches as totally irrelevant as they were witty. Shaw was frequently there, "always explicit and careful to make himself misunderstood." "But as to a sane enterprise towards expropriating landlords . . . ! And earnest adolescence, being above all things impatient, presently gave up attending these meetings." [2] Shaw they encountered again at the Fabian Society, and Burton on one occasion drew his wrath upon the group by a too-persistent questioning. "I object to Bernard Shaw rather," Wells recorded, "he is such a giddy creature."

§ 3

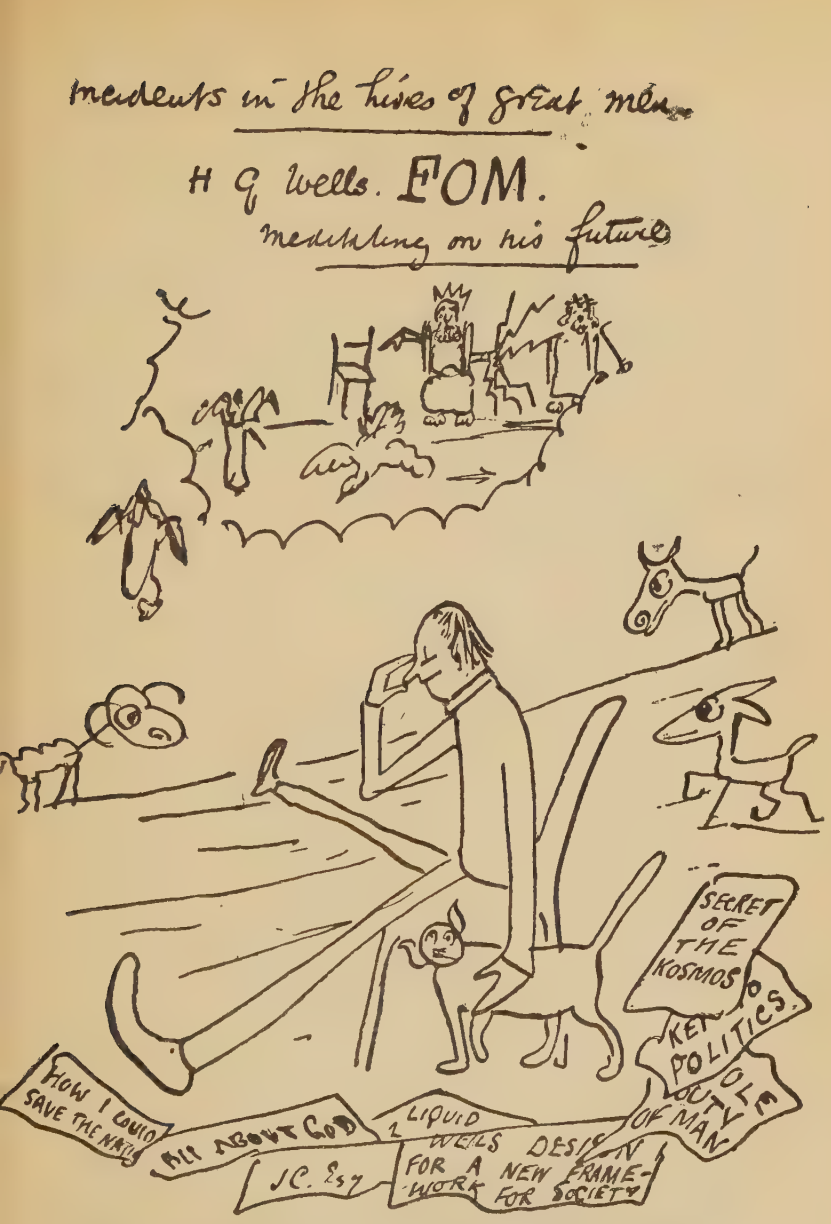
The summer holidays of 1886 were spent mostly on an uncle's farm at Minsterworth, in Gloucestershire, "a beautiful lonesome land" where, save for occasional excursions to Cheltenham and the Forest of Dean, there was nothing to do but study, smoke, consume cider, and write letters. In the Forest he noted the rapid transition from the slaggy smoking works and black yawning coal pits to "quite perfect sylvan

[1] *Well at the World's End.*
[2] *Ibid.*

scenery," fit, with its ancient spreading oaks, "for Robin Hood or old Silenus even."

While at Minsterworth he learned the results of the June examinations, in which a first class in the comparatively unimportant Geometrical Drawing by no means balanced second classes in Elementary Physics and Geology, and a complete failure in Astronomical Physics. His practical work in Physics was remarked upon as of quite unparalleled badness. He wrote at once to Simmons. It was useless to hope for another year at the School—could his friend send him immediately a list of agents for situations? A day or two later he wrote to know why the list was not to hand; soon "the engaging season" would be over, and "with that all my prospects of getting a respectable berth." Simmons thought he looked too gloomily on his prospects, but Wells replied: "Even if it is possible to get another year at South Kensington I don't think I shall come up. I am so disgusted with the extreme poverty in which we have to live. If I can get over £90 I shan't come. There! One matter I wish to consult you about. How are recommendations raised? I have only two. One from the Preceptor of my tender years, the other from a chap with whom I served a year.... Are clerical puffs of any weight? Because I know one or two curate kings who believe in my eminent respectability. Prompt and copious answers will oblige." He concluded optimistically with the prophetic sketch below.

The necessary post did not materialise; and early in September he was with his father at Bromley and announcing to Simmons his return to the School, adding that Burton and others, following a suggestion of Wells himself, were planning "a sort of Advanced Political Mission down in the Debating Society." "To educate politically a lot of fellows who will presently be scattered all over the country in intellectually influential positions might end in Smith being an M.P. some day, Burton becoming the Isaiah of the Nineteenth Century and you one of H.M. Inspectors of Schools. Probably the best thing I could do in the cause of


Incidents in the Lives of Great Men
H G Wells. FOM.
meditating on his future
SECRET OF THE KOSMOS
KEY TO POLITICS
DUTY OF MAN
HOW I COULD SAVE THE NATION
ALL ABOUT GOD
JC. Esq
LIQUID WELLS DESIGN FOR A NEW FRAME-WORK FOR SOCIETY

"Incidents in the Lives of Great Men" (1886)

(FROM A LETTER TO THE LATE A. T. SIMMONS)

Social Improvement would be to take orders. It would irrevocably damage the Establishment." His immediate aid took the form of a paper on Democratic Socialism, with which, like Lewisham, he opened his third year at the School. It was read to the Society on October 15th, 1886, and defined socialism as the principle of the merging of the individual in the State, with State control of Production and Distribution. Its appeal was practical, not emotional; Wells confessed his disbelief in human unselfishness. A few months later he was again, in debate, upholding the essential democratic belief—the equality of all men "in the absolute"—and attacking the worship of great men as a curse upon mankind, a sign perhaps of the waning influence of Carlyle, so lately one of his literary gods.

But the great event of this third year was the establishment of the *Science Schools Journal*. It was Tutton who first suggested in the Debating Society the need for a School magazine. He wanted something philosophical and scientific, but Wells, Simmons, Burton, Gregory and Davies—whose interests had of late been shifting towards literature as such—resolved to develop the notion in their own way. Wells was made editor by general acclamation. The first issue appeared in December 1886, price sixpence; it consisted of 32 pages and contained scientific and other articles, an essay, *Socrates,* by Herbert G. Wells, the inevitable parody of "To be or not to be," and reports of various School societies and sports clubs. Some 500 copies were printed of each of the first half-dozen numbers in the hope that old students would subscribe: but though the first number sold out this success was not repeated, and the editor had large stocks of subsequent issues left on his hands. Eventually supply and demand were adjusted, the magazine precariously paid its way, and with some vicissitudes but without serious interruption has survived to the present day under its amended titles of the *Royal College of Science Magazine* and the *Phoenix*. Yet before seven years had passed Wells himself was to regret the thing he had created. What he

intended, he explained in his preface to the first number, was to offer the students a vehicle for literary expression: "Here, from north, south, east, and west, are gathered minds especially capable of acquiring, retaining, and displaying systematic knowledge. Clearness of perception, imagination, and order are alike *the* mental requirements of the scientist and the writer. We may, therefore, reasonably expect that our pages will be filled with right opinion well expressed." The hope was not realised. In 1893 Wells said that he had proved South Kensington students only "narrow and illiterate."

With the April 1887 issue he gave up the editorship to Burton, at the urgent request of the Registrar, who declared that Wells was neglecting his work. But the change, Mr. Burton says, was purely nominal; so long as Wells was in the School he remained the effective controlling force besides being the chief contributor. He had at this critical time, moreover, another enterprise in hand, no less irrelevant to his essential studies—a burlesque scientific lecture which proved a riotous success on delivery to the Debating Society. Its subject was a perpetual motion machine of startlingly simple design, consisting solely of a rod weighted at both ends and swinging on a horizontal axis. One weight presented to the audience a boldly painted figure 6, the other a figure 9. The lecturer raised the latter almost to the highest point of its swing and released it, when its heavier weight carried it down and round and by reason of its impetus up on the other side. Instantly the inverted 9 became 6, and lighter, and the inverted 6 similarly 9, and heavier, and so it continued. It was deftly demonstrated that this change did take place by showing that while the weight floated in water as 6, when inverted to 9 it sank. He repudiated indignantly the suggestion that the sound accompanying the steady working of his Invention was an electro-magnet switched on and off to keep it in motion; he proved it to be merely a coffee-mill to which his machine supplied power by producing from under the table a quantity of freshly ground coffee.

It was a cheerful schoolboy lark, with a touch of more than schoolboy imagination, but it did not help his studies, and though in the last few weeks he strove to make up for lost time he was, he says, "slaughtered" beyond hope of recovery in the June 1887 finals. In Astronomical Physics, which he was taking for the second time, he got no better than a second class, and in Advanced Geology he failed completely. Only a very brilliant student could hope for a grant to stay at South Kensington beyond the third year, and once more like Lewisham he found himself urgently seeking work without a degree or even a record of particularly good work during his training.

§ 4

Yet if he left with few honours, he had gained much. He had taken a tremendous stride towards the satisfaction of his basic need "to know personally, to get hold of the hang of life." From his studies in geology, in biology, in physics, and in astronomy he had built up an ordered vision of the world, at least sufficiently coherent for him to plan, while still at South Kensington, a universal history.

"Let me try to give you the chief things I had. I had man definitely placed in the great scheme of space and time. I knew him incurably for what he was, finite and not final, a being of compromises and adaptations. I had traced his lungs, for example, from a swimming bladder, step by step, with scalpel and probe, through a dozen types or more, I had seen the ancestral cæcum shrink to that disease nest, the appendix of today, I had watched the gill slit patched slowly to the purposes of the ear and the reptile jaw suspension utilised to eke out the needs of a sense organ taken from its native and natural water. I had worked out the development of those extraordinarily unsatisfactory and untrustworthy instruments, man's teeth, from the skin scutes of the shark to their present function as a basis for gold

stoppings, and followed the slow unfolding of the complex and painful process of gestation through which man comes into the world. I had followed all these things and many kindred things by dissection and in embryology. I had checked the whole theory of development again in a year's course of palæontology, and I had taken the dimensions of the whole process, by the scale of the stars, in a course of astronomical physics." [1]

He had been a student indeed not for the minor end of passing examinations, but for the more truly humanistic purpose of apprehending the universe and his relation to it. The record of these three years may not be brilliant academically, but they shaped, far more than anything which went before or was to follow, the H. G. Wells the world was to know. Without them he might have been a greater novelist, but he would have been another man. Not only *The Time Machine* and the other early scientific romances, but *Anticipations, A Modern Utopia, The New Machiavelli, The Undying Fire* and *The World of William Clissold* (I take these few titles at random) were the direct fruit of the Wellsian imagination fostered by the training of the Normal School of Science.

His connection with the School—it became the Royal College of Science in 1891—was as close for the next few years as circumstances permitted. He attended occasional meetings of the Debating Society towards the end of 1888 and the beginning of 1889, sometimes in lighter vein as the sprightly critic deftly puncturing the bubbles of accepted opinion, sometimes more serious, as in a friendly debate with Simmons on January 11th, 1889, on the old topic of socialism. He leaned now towards the comparatively new Marxian socialism, which satisfied him as "based upon Darwinism." He wanted, he said, not equality of condition but equality of opportunity, to be realised by the abolition of inheritance and of all property not individually earned. The subsequent discussion is interesting mainly for his discour-

[1] *Scepticism of the Instrument.*

agement of "voluntary checks" upon reproduction; over-population and competition were, he said, blindly adopting Darwin's own superficial view, "the salt that keeps the body of the organic kingdom from decay."

He contributed articles, stories, poems, and letters to the College magazine fairly frequently until 1895, when following a correspondence which clearly exasperated him —it had to do with a minor question of degrees and gowns —he irritably wondered why, after all, he still bothered to write. "It is a matter of sentiment I suppose: the memory of those happy days when I was always receiving blue forms, underlined red, for smoking through some demonstrator's keyhole, whistling on your magnificent staircase, absenting myself without leave and coming late, failing those absurd examinations that give you such heart-searching times in your first year, and living crescendo on Wednesday afternoon (pay-day) to pianissimo on the subsequent Tuesday. And the memory gets mellower as we get further away from the real thing." [1] He was, he said, the only old student not on the staff who cared a rap about the college; now he was tired and had done with it!

Some years later he repented, and again contributed. When in December 1908 an Old Students dinner was held at the Criterion Restaurant in Piccadilly Circus, he presided, and became President for 1909 of the Old Students Association. During that year he attended no committee meetings, and referring to this in his speech at the next annual dinner he said that he had only continued the record of his earlier years as an inveterate idle apprentice by sowing the wild oats of the Association. "I am just an example of Royal College of Science tailings."

[1] *Royal College of Science Magazine,* March 1895.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TEACHER

§ 1

DESPITE his status as a rejected student-teacher, Wells soon found a post at a small private school near Holt on the Cheshire border of Denbighshire. Perhaps because it was so far afield, his employer proved conveniently not too particular as to academic distinctions.

He travelled to Holt one hot July day. "By the grace of the great and good God, and, it must be added, reverently but firmly, at considerable trouble and expense to myself, I have reached this locality without further accident than the loss of two books. Considering the small premium I pay in prayer for Divine insurance, I suppose I ought to feel grateful for this limited measure of protection." [1] An unpleasant surprise awaited him, for the school was one only to be compared to the famous establishment of Mr. Wackford Squeers. It too boasted the title of Academy, and its pupils were a score or so of boarders—"louts training for the Nonconformist ministry"—and a few local farmers' sons. He has written of the proprietor very frankly. "Beulah Roberts," as he calls him, was "a thick-set, bright-eyed man, speaking English with a Welsh intonation, loquacious, persuasive, at times almost eloquent." [2] He wore the usual schoolmaster's chimney-pot hat, white tie, and black frock coat, but his linen was dirty, his teeth black, and his complexion unhealthy. In

[1] *Academy for Young Gentlemen.*
[2] Letter to A. M. Davies.

fact, he drank, and his wife, the wreck of a pretty woman, drank with him.

The wretched school was kept in existence only by low fees and the sheer insolicitude of parents. The schoolroom had broken windows dim with dirt, whitewashed walls, and a bare brick floor. The desks were decrepit, neglect everywhere obtrusive, and in Wells's own room there was not even a chair safe to sit upon. The cooking was bad, the meals served at all hours upon bare tables. At night the boys were herded without supervision three in a bed and several in a room. The proprietor himself did little teaching, and asked scarcely more of Wells and the other assistant master, an unfortunate Frenchman, than that they should keep order, if necessary by the corporal punishment his prospectus specifically disavowed. There was no time-table, and unexpected half-holidays alternated with days when teachers and pupils would be kept at lessons late into the evening. For a while "Roberts" would be fitfully attentive within the limits of his essential negligence. "Abruptly, one day, he would enter the schoolroom, eyes glazed and steps uncertain, to make a rambling speech, perhaps before the boys, or quarrel incoherently with the usher." [1] For the next week would follow a steady decline to disorder, the bigger boys getting more and more out of hand. It was what Wells saw in this school, even more than what he had experienced at Bromley, that made him, as a contributor to the educational papers, urge some system of registration and inspection for all private schools.

He was, upon his arrival in Wales, undoubtedly taken aback. He had come expecting the picturesque, he told his friends, and found instead a desolate flat land. The people were "Presbyterian, Radical and all that is altogether damnable." The chemistry cupboard contained only cracked bottles and broken test-tubes. Prayer took up so much time that none remained for writing. The girls to whom he taught mathematics at the local Ladies' College were all

[1] *Ibid.*

repulsively ugly. The River Dee was three-and-a-half feet deep, and there was a gas-works in the village!

But soon his buoyant spirits were asserting themselves and things wore a brighter aspect. The weather was magnificent. He was feeling exceptionally well. He had a reputation for learning and no one was capable of unmasking him; his employer in particular was "an ignorant fool, to be come over with astonishing facility." He was doing no work, and bothering little about his classes, so that he had time both to write letters and for serious efforts at authorship. A number of short stories were certainly written about this time. The majority suffered the fate of *The Death of Miss Peggy Pickersgill's Cat,* which, after a number of rejections, was burnt, but one at least was accepted and even paid for by the *Family Herald.* A novel of 35,000 words, *Lady Frankland's Companion,* was almost completed this summer—it was finished later at Uppark—and another may have been started; if he did not actually write then the story of *The Chronic Argonauts,* which is of interest as the first version of *The Time Machine,* certainly it was his visit to Holt which provided the Welsh setting for that tale.

In addition to leisure, he told Davies and Simmons, he had a pound tin of tobacco, a French colleague "who teaches me *parler cochon* and who is atheist, socialist, cuckold maker, and all that is lovable in a comrade," and he had, moreover, a friend, "a creature with a soul. She is a pretty girl, minister's daughter, teacher in a high school. When we met we were enchanted. She has read Ruskin, Eliot, and an infinity of good novels. Now we meet surreptitiously and spend whole hours together by shady river banks, where I talk grotesque to her, and she very intelligently to me." Doubtless it was too good to last. Annie's holiday would end; the tobacco would diminish to bitter dust; the boys would get out of hand; he would weary of his colleague. Presently his conscience would begin to trouble his Arcadian laziness—but meanwhile he was making the most of it. His letters at the end of August comprised "an expectant

catalogue of sensual delights—bright weather, perfect health, pretty girl in the foreground of a sunset by a pollard-bordered stream, football, success, and so forth."

Disaster came with terrifying suddenness. On August 30th he was charged on the football field, knocked down, and accidentally kicked and trampled on. In a few catastrophic hours Arcadia had given place to a barely furnished bedroom, and dependence upon the uncertain attentions of Mr. and Mrs. "Roberts." And presently ... "life-destroying hæmorrhage." Yet once the first alarm was over it was more the tedium of his situation which troubled him; there was no one to see, nothing to do, not even books to read. Therefore when his employer suggested none too agreeably that Wells had best be up and about, he complied unwisely but not altogether unwillingly. Burton, now a chemist in the Potteries, visited Holt with the newly-wedded Mrs. Burton towards the end of September. Wells's appearance shocked them both; he was, for all his vivacity, so obviously ill—thin, white, and frail. A second collapse followed. The doctor from Wrexham diagnosed consumption, and urged the necessity for care and proper nursing.

He gave up his post and went to his mother at Uppark about the middle of November. The wearisome daylong journey exhausted him, and severe hæmorrhage followed a day or two later. Luckily a Dr. Collins (now Sir W. J. Collins, K.C.V.O.), a friend of the Featherstonhaughs, was in the house; he received, as he was dressing for dinner after a day's shooting, an urgent request to come to the housekeeper's room, and by the immediate application of ice was able to allay the attack.

§ 2

The story of the next few months is one of continually recurring relapses and recoveries. One day Wells is up and about, reading, writing letters and stories, planning for the future; the next in bed or confined to one room, too ill to do

anything but wonder whether there could be any future at all for him. Yet though he could not escape dejection he never gave in to it. "I have a faint idea," he wrote to Davies, "that God has sent all this to chasten me. If so, he has certainly mistaken his man. I have learnt some wholesome lessons in human charity but I repudiate God more than ever. He's a beggar, he is." Dr. Collins's first report was encouraging—he found no consumption—but a re-examination made it appear that recovery must be slow, and for long it was doubtful whether Wells would ever be more than an invalid dependent upon others. It is, in the circumstances, impossible not to admire the courage with which he faced the wreck of all that made life worth living, for if living meant anything to him it meant activity, power, progress; passive contemplation comes low in his scale of the virtues, and he made a restive patient for his devoted but distressed mother. "Most potent, grave, and reverend Signor," he addressed Simmons from "the House of the Captivity, Valley of the Shadow of Death," "the doctor thinks my kidney has a lovely effusion round it and promises something interesting in the tumour way in about a year's time. He holds out hopes of dyspepsia (chronic). He congratulates me on a thoroughly disorganised right lung and suggests darkly that if I want to stop all the bother I have only got to sit between a fire and an open window for a couple of hours, and congestion of the lungs will manage it. He explains that he has hopes of diabetes or even gravel for me. He is sure I shall always be a chronic invalid. He wishes there was more like me. He wishes everyone played football. He wishes me Good Morn." It is nonsense of course, and misrepresents what the doctor actually did say, but the simple ability to be nonsensical over the news that he was a good deal worse than he had hoped, is typical of his resilience. He sketched himself sitting by the fire amongst pills and bottles; the thing hanging about his neck, he noted, was not a cravat but a thermometer. "It is rather slow," he added, "but the universe is getting thought out thoroughly."

Early in December he had another bad turn, "spitting gore-laden tissue secretly into the fire to save my excellent mother from panic-collapse, and privately preparing my mind for dissolution." [1] By Christmas, which his father and brothers spent in Uppark, to the envy of the other servants, he was again better. He told Davies: "I danced three contre dances and waltzed a waltz on Monday; also did (not sang) a duet with my brother Frank, and was put to bed at half past four by the rest of our family: from which you may judge about my health."

But despite such interludes he found Uppark intolerably dull, even with reading, writing, some correspondence study, and short walks as he got better. Here again he had no one to talk to. The servants were "all dead—purely automatic. Each of them has fifteen remarks to say over and they get through the lot each mealtime. 'The days draw out nicely.' 'The frost continues.' 'The poor souls without coals must suffer,' and so on." Frequently the servants' quarters would be crowded by the valets and maids of visitors, the "bloated aristocrats" above stairs took first thought in everyone's mind, and if he ventured to express his feelings, Mrs. Wells would immediately burst into agitated tears. "O God how dull I am! O God how dull!" [2]

From Christmas onward he was planning hopefully to visit the Burtons at Stoke-on-Trent. Early in February he was "almost athletic," but went for a seven-mile walk through thawing snow. "Today lungs positively rustle when I breathe. . . . Expect to congest in a day or two. In which case—Farewell." [3] Perhaps he reached at this time the nadir of his hopes. On February 20th he wrote to Miss Healey: "I have been experiencing lately what everybody has to experience who drops out of the marching column as I have done. I have been shedding my friends ever since my failures distinctly set in. I may drag on a maimed existence in this accursed land of winds, wet days and old women for three

[1] Letter to A. T. Simmons.
[2] Letter to A. T. Simmons.
[3] Letter to A. M. Davies.

or four years yet." And three days later: "I shall never join the Marching Column again. My youth went long ago—my *life work* will be to give as little trouble as possible in an uncongenial universe while I stay therein and not leave too big a hole in anyone else's world when my creation terminates." On March 8th he corroborated: "My views about my health are not a bit overdrawn. I am going down the hill like a toboggan"; and again he responded to her invitation to take part in a debate in London on his way to the Burtons: "I am about as fit to read a half-hour's paper and live through the subsequent debate and afterwards to go and breathe night-air as I am to swell about London with the dome of St. Paul's as a hat or catch tigers by hand in their native jungle."

Yet even at this time he was by no means concerned solely with his ailments to the exclusion of other interests. On March 2nd, when almost at his worst, he light-heartedly told Miss Healey: "I must call attention to a virtue of mine. This virtue is Catholicity of Appreciation. All the first order of Poets have it or had it (some of them are dead). I like a frog being amphibious in matters of opinion am appreciated by beings who are incapable of intercourse (v. my unpublished fable—*The Frog, the Pike, and the Stork*). You say my lines are lacking in metre—metres are used for gas, not the outpourings of the human heart. You say my poem has no feet! The humming bird has no feet, the Cherubim round the Mater Dolorosa have no feet. The Ancients figured the Poetic Afflatus as a horse *winged* to signify the Poet was sparing of his feet."

He might in the same letter say that his "saddest parting of all will be with grimy old London in which I dreamt, until a few days ago, of working some schemes before I died," but such schemes were never abandoned, either before or after. During all this Uppark period he was busily reading and writing. Burton, "most excellent of Christians, best of Friends, and most visionary of Politicians," sent him a hamper of books, and he borrowed fiction from the local curate. Heine, Keats, Spenser ("the glades, tangled under-

woods, enchanted castles and glinting streams of his land have a wonderful charm I find for me"), Emerson ("platitudes in barbaric ornaments—country curates in turbans and sashes"), Rousseau, Stevenson, Blackmore, Walter Besant, and Whitman are some of the names mentioned in his letters at this time. Of Whitman, he says unexpectedly: "I admire Whitman—but is he a success? My idea of success is entirely fruit. You can only crop philosophy from Whitman; from Tennyson or Scott young men can gather real power, young women real grace of womanliness." [1] He was evidently in reaction from his discipleship to Carlyle, and Ruskin had become "that blatant old mystic." Carlyle was, nevertheless, with Hawthorne, the evident influence upon his prose at this time. But between 1888 and the journalism of 1891 and 1892 "a cleansing cause of Swift and Sterne intervened," [2] and there is in the professionally printed work little evidence of the earlier admiration.

The novel, *Lady Frankland's Companion,* was now complete, and while seeking a publisher he planned to work on some "non-realistic" fiction—perhaps *The Chronic Argonauts.* The other unfinished novel was also in hand, there was correspondence with the *Fortnightly Review* about a projected article, and a number of short stories were written. But alas, ambition ran ahead of success, and it was a sorry account which Davies received a little later in the year:

Item	1 Short Story	Sold	£1
Item	1 Novel. 35,000 words	Burnt	0.0.0.
Item	1 Novel unfinished 25,000	Burnt	0.0.0.
Item	Much comic poetry	Lost	0.0.0.
——	Some comic prose	Sent away never returned.	
Item	Humorous essay.	*Globe,* did not return.	
Item	Sundry Stories.	Burnt	
Item	1 Story	Wandering	
Item	A Poem	Burnt	
		etc etc	
		Total income (untaxed)	£1.0.0.

[1] Letter to Elizabeth Healey.
[2] Atlantic Edition, Volume I, Preface.

"Some day I shall succeed, I really believe," he commented, "but it is a weary game."

His outlook at this time appears clearly, if with a touch of ceremonial pomposity, in a letter written in February 1888, to Dr. Collins: "You pointed out when you last did me the favour of examining my chest, how difficult it would be to get any employment compatible with my precarious health, without special concessions and personal influence. Miss Featherstonhaugh holds out very small hope of assisting me in this way, and Sir William King, her agent, to whom she mentioned the matter, spoke in an exceedingly depreciating way of the prospects of obtaining anything of the kind required. I am very ignorant of social conditions above my own level, but it appears to me that you, moving, as you are, among people who as a class are engaged in more vigorous intellectual employments and who are more intricately involved in the business of life than those with whom Miss Featherstonhaugh comes chiefly into contact, would be far more influential in this present matter than she is. A very large portion of the visitors here is of the three orders of military gentry, clerical dignitaries, or that fortunate independent class whose only business is to live happily, and it seems to me that the only employment that such a connection could offer above the rank of an unmitigated menial, is a private tutorship, for which I should, even after a very unwholesome meal of my principles, be vastly less suitable than the most rejected young gentleman that ever behaved himself at Oxford. You, on the other hand, are acquainted with men like Harrison, Bernard Shaw, the Huxleys, who must from the active and extensive nature of their engagements of necessity employ numerous fags to assist in the more onerous and less responsible portions of their duties. It was this that I had especially in view when I mentioned my desire for employment to you, but I am afraid that I failed to express myself with sufficient definiteness on that occasion, and that I led you to understand that I appreciated wine and oil above a consistent position and the prospects of self-advancement.

My constitutional tendencies all incline me to prefer staking the preservation of my life on my utility, to imperilling, as everyone counsels, my utility to preserve my life; I would rather do what I wanted and felt was right to be done, and retire soon with some faint irradiation of human dignity and self-applause, than survive for a long period to my own discontent and the general impoverishment. (This is applied Socialism.) This is my second and more powerful reason for coming upon you in this way to help me to some work, because I consider you are not only more able to assist me, but that you are the only person who is willing and in a position to bring me into contact with that world of liberal thought, in which alone the peculiar circumstances of my education render me capable of attaining to any degree of success."

He added that should his appeal for help seem a mistaken presumption, he would not, "even in my secret soul, pose as the rejected genius, or the young man who couldn't get on because the world was inappreciative, or any nonsense of that sort." Dr. Collins did recognise the unusual quality of his patient, but he could do nothing effective, and in the end Wells had to dispense with the very mixed blessings of patronage.

His next move was to Stoke-on-Trent. At the end of March he was looking forward eagerly to new scenes and company. "I am not a broken-down invalid," he informed Miss Healey. "I have merely had a revolution in my constitution—on the principle that a man who would revolutionise the world must first revolutionise himself." He spent a night or two in London and paid an afternoon visit to South Kensington. The effort and excitement produced once more, following his arrival at the Burtons', relapse and hæmorrhage, until it seemed to Wells himself and his distressed host and hostess that he could not possibly recover, that "the hungry maw will presently engulf the Prophet of the Undelivered Spell, and the unwarned world hurry on to damnation." "It is one of the most painful features of this

form of human collapse," he wrote on May 1st, "to feel continually power slipping away." [1]

But with the approach of summer he mended rapidly. A few weeks and he was positively playful, dating his letters from Stuck-on-Trent, Jejewn, 1888: "I am, speaking generally, better in spirits this day than I have been for some time, certing saddening discoveries of mortal clayiness having weighed upon me and hitherto prevented that lamblike gambolling of mind which is one of my most charming characteristics." [2] It is his high spirits which Mr. and Mrs. Burton best recall today, his vivid mimicry of the grand folk above stairs at Uppark, the no less dignified elderly retainers below, the extraordinary arguments with which he would "draw" his more placid host, and his way, when he saw he had gone too far, of coming across the room with fluttering pacific hands: "Now, now, old chappie, now, now ..." Undoubtedly he did at times irritate his friends by his alternating vivacity and depression and, besides, his personal untidiness. He held that one should either dress beautifully or be so completely slovenly as to become picturesque, and the latter was the alternative best suited to his pocket.

He was soon busy again with his pen, "Burton victualling manfully," sketching out about this time a sensational melodrama of Five Towns life of which a short story, *The Cone,* is the only relic. *The Chronic Argonauts* appeared in the April, May, and June numbers of the *Science Schools Journal.* His friends complained that it broke off just when the reader's interest was roused. He replied: *"The Chronic Argonauts* was no joke. There is a sequel—it is the latest Delphic voice but the tripod is not yet broken." [3] That sequel was written but never printed.[4]

In July he returned to London, eager to make up for lost time. He had by no means recovered; virtually he re-

[1] Letter to Elizabeth Healey.
[2] Letter to Elizabeth Healey.
[3] Letter to Elizabeth Healey.
[4] See Appendix.

mained an invalid—however capable at times of continuous labour—for the next twelve years.

§ 3

He went to live in Fitzroy Road, Primrose Hill, and began his quest for employment, no better off than he had been a full year before.

Jennings, now at the Birkbeck Institute, gave him temporary work drawing biological diagrams, and this with a little visiting teaching carried him through the autumn to Christmas. The winter tried him severely, like every successive winter, but he carried on. He devoted all the time he could to writing, which henceforth absorbed most of his leisure, though not at once to the exclusion of politics, for in November he was wondering whether to join the Fabian Society. Literary success came slowly—he supposes that he tried the wrong papers—and till 1891 his work, apart from a few brief items in the *Henley House Magazine,* will be found only in the pages of the *Science Schools Journal.*

He was fortunate in obtaining, quite early in the New Year (1889), an assistant mastership at Henley House School, in Mortimer Road, Kilburn. This again was a private school, but of a type new in the young teacher's experience. Mr. John Vine Milne was an educationalist of imagination and ability. No one, Wells has said, realised his high calling better or said less about it. He was an inspired "maker of men" who fired his assistants with a similar enthusiasm. "He showed them that teaching had something in it that the ablest men might aspire to master without loss of dignity. By example, without a word of precept, he drove the suggestion home." Unlike Morley he asserted as little, and explained as much, as possible; he sought in every subject to create interest through understanding. He "was an educational reformer far ahead of his time. Many good methods and new and better ways, that have still to gain

I am in London seeking work.

But at present finding none
I am not in for the Intermediate or
any such games.
Yours in God
H. G. Wells

"I am in London seeking work" (1888)
(FROM A LETTER TO THE LATE A. T. SIMMONS)

their footing in the public schools, were practised under him and, besides, advocated by him."[1] His proudest boast was that he kept his pupils happy, and never called a boy stupid. He had raised his school from poverty in 1878 (when he became proprietor on the death of the previous owner) to prosperity in 1889. In 1894 he left Kilburn for a larger school at Westgate-on-Sea; he has since retired, but happily is in good health today at the age of eighty-five. He has been twice President of the Private Schools Association, which he helped to organise.

Wells had a happy time at Henley House, as his subsequent friendship with his employer testified. He found the boys honest, polite, and intelligent; he was well satisfied with his salary of two pounds a week; and the work was a pleasure compared with Holt. Mr. Milne recalls him as an excellent teacher of clever boys, but scarcely patient enough with those less intelligent; he would recall a wandering attention with irritably aimed fragments of chalk, and, from the recollections of those who suffered rather than succeeded under him, impositions flew little less readily. His employer quickly recognised both abilities and limitations, and gave him a class of five senior boys for special science lessons. Mr. Milne's two sons, Kenneth and Alan (better known as A. A. Milne), were, he declares, "inspired" by Wells's teaching of science and mathematics.

The majority of the boys were less favourably impressed. One of them, Mr. J. S. Macdonald, recalls Wells as not popular with the boys because he failed to join them at games in the playing-field. "Worse than this, he once made an appearance in the school playground, a roughish gravel place where tarred boards had been laid down against a high wall with a wicket painted thereon for rough practice cricket. It was a school tradition that no master ever ventured into the playground, but Mr. Wells, in all innocence, came out one day and started to bowl for any boy who

[1] *Academy for Young Gentlemen.*

cared to bat. To crown all, he bowled underhand." There still exists a photograph of the boys and staff, with Mr. Milne in the centre of the group, Wells frail and Stevensonian on one side, and just behind and above him with long fair Fauntleroy ringlets the future author of *The Dover Road* and *When We Were Very Young*. Wells was thin and, Mr. Milne recollects, so emaciated that Mrs. Milne was greatly concerned to make him eat more. Dinner there was an ample meal, he noted appreciatively to Simmons; not only beer and cheese but even flowers on the table and "all in keeping with this luxurious item."

The school magazine has achieved some notoriety as being originated and first edited by Alfred Harmsworth, one of Mr. Milne's earliest pupils at Henley House. Wells looked up its early issues to find them "displaying considerable journalistic and quite inconsiderable literary aptitude." He has said that Mr. Milne similarly detected his own journalistic potentialities and put the editorship in his hands, but Mr. Milne fancies that he himself retained control, Wells only contributing four short articles and a note between March 1889 and August 1891. Incidentally, it was at Henley House that Wells first met Harmsworth, then a visiting "old boy," at a time when *Answers* had not long been launched; when they next met, Wells was a novelist of fame and fortune and Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe, rather) a successful newspaper proprietor.

It had been arranged that Wells should live at the school, but he preferred to lodge in Fitzroy Road. He may have hoped for greater freedom for private tutoring and other work—he taught physiology and mathematics at a neighbouring girls' school. Probably, too, he found it more convenient for his studies. In July he sat for the Intermediate Science Examination of London University, and passed with Second Class Honours in Zoölogy. By September he was making a preliminary survey of the syllabus for the final B.Sc. examination next year, and had selected Zoölogy, Geology, and Mental and Moral Science as his three best

subjects. "Besides," he told Simmons, "there is so much humbug in Mental and Moral Science that I believe it will be particularly easy for me with my special gifts in that direction to collar the D.Sc." He had too the Fellowship of the College of Preceptors in mind as "not a bad thing to get," and now he made the first step in that direction by entering for the Licentiateship.

What settled his decision was, it appears, a conscious need to supplement his practical experience of teaching method by a systematic knowledge of its principles, but on investigation he discovered other attractions. He found a teacher's payment, at any rate in the case of an assistant master without a degree, barely remunerative for the time actually spent in teaching, and two pounds a week for a man saving up to be married meant a continuous parsimony. "I never imagined," he wrote a little later to Mr. Milne, "that you too had experienced the pleasure of watching a desirable thing, a needed sofa or a tempting auto-type, swim into reach of the landing net. And the pleasure of regarding the smallest possession or position won is keen when you can say 'I made that—out of nothing.' I have never believed much in actual gratification as a source of happiness, the best is what comes incidentally. Happiness is a colour things take, not a substance. Life is eviscerated when most of one's energy is not needed to live. Poverty—that is not hopeless—is as good a soil as any for happiness."

The late Edwin Pugh once suggested that Wells had never known the meaning of real poverty in the sense of having no one to whom to turn for a meal or a roof beneath which to sleep; always he had reserves, his family and friends. This may be so, but it does not destroy the reality of his need. His was the poverty of one who must keep up appearances; his job depended on it. Therefore, when he learnt that the College of Preceptors offered prizes, one of ten pounds and two of five pounds, he set out to win these for their own sakes. From October he was working really

hard. "The Augustan Age, the Great Literary Period, seems over," he informed Simmons regretfully, and even the B.Sc. work was put aside. When asked to coach a young teacher he replied that he couldn't before January, but in suggesting a very modest fee characteristically added: "If he is a chap who is really hard up and trying I would do him for much less, for I have a keen sympathy for the struggling man." Fortunately his health kept good; he put on weight, though slowly. Davies was in London, about to matriculate, and they "worked each other up in dates, etymologies, and geographical niceties to an extraordinary pitch"; and "I feel as much at home in the focus of a parabola as if I had been born there."[1] The examination (for which he prepared a thesis on Froebel) came just after Christmas, and the result was announced in January. He passed in the Theory and Practice of Education, English Language, Geography, Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, Natural Philosophy, Zoölogy, Chemistry, Drawing, History, Trigonometry, Analytical Geometry, Animal Physiology, Geology, and Experimental Physics—the first ten with honours. He was awarded all three prizes: Theory and Practice of Education (£10), Mathematics (£5), and Natural Science (£5).

Already, when the news came, better things were in prospect. At the end of the Christmas term he had asked Mr. Milne for more money, obtained a ten-pound increase, negotiated for less time, given notice, interviewed prospective employers, and then rather than leave London decided to stay with "the eminent educator at Kilburn" for another year at least. Subsequent events were narrated in a bulletin sent to Simmons in January:

"Stock Exchange Intelligence
"Great Boom in Wells's

"We have to announce a surprising run upon H. G. Wells Limited Ordinary and Debenture A in consequence of the

[1] Letter to A. T. Simmons.

Entirely Unexpected Improvement

in the prospects of that concern. It began with the spontaneous gift of one half holiday placed at the disposal of the enterprise by J. V. Milne over and above the covenanted quantity. This was the first pattering of the approaching fall. The next thing was a

Mysterious Communication

from a person of the name of Briggs requesting the honour of an interview at Cambridge and offering the Company

His Fare

there and back. In the meanwhile Holland offered to hand over two excellent classes in going order at Highbury, he having won a Berkeleian Scholarship at Owens, and vague rumours came from the College of Preceptors of circumstances favourable to the company. It was on Saturday last that

The Storm Burst.

Briggs turned out to be the University Correspondence College with examining work, vice Fernando who has passed to higher things. This week it has taken the shape of over £2 and promises to run to more. Then came, on Wednesday, the College of Preceptors results

Honours—Eighty per cent

on fifteen papers out of twenty—establishing my pedagogic position—and all the prizes I had dared to hope for, £20 in all, vide *Educational Times*. Compliments from Secretary, enthusiasm in school, the town

Painted Red."

He left Henley House School at the end of the summer term, Dr. Briggs promising him at least £2 a week for twenty hours' work until he obtained his B.Sc. and then a substantial increase. He began work for the College early in

February. A letter to Miss Healey sketches him at his first demonstration; he comments gaily: "Life is a weary alternation of work, mealtimes and sleep beginning in darkness and ending in death." To Simmons he wrote: "I *do* like being slapped on the back by my friends. It is just you and one or two others that made the great hard-up break bearable and now there are some inklings of success it is the thought of sharing the glee of it with you that makes it really worth having and persevering after. Plenty of work to do altogether—feel quite an active useful person. Pace too high though—life a bubble—smash at any moment."

Smash he was to, certainly, but that was still three years head.

§ 4

The University Correspondence College had been founded a few years previously at Cambridge by Dr. William Briggs, a man of considerable ability and a pioneer in his field, for the purpose of coaching by post external and isolated candidates for standard examinations. His methods, based on a close study of the difficulties involved, proved extraordinarily successful from every point of view, and at the time of Wells's accession some forty tutors were employed. It had been found desirable in some science courses to supplement postal instruction by practical work, and in March 1889, the University Tutorial College opened in Booksellers' Row, a narrow turning from the Strand demolished thirty years ago. The classes were held on the upper floors over the shop and offices of Messrs. Clive & Co., later the University Tutorial Press, a publishing firm connected with the College. To these premises Wells came to teach principally biology but also geology. In connection with his work here he has sometimes used the term "cramming classes," but he holds a high opinion of their utility, and has often expressed the hope of seeing correspondence teaching become a recognised feature of university life.

He took classes all through 1890, working meanwhile for the October B.Sc. examination, and keeping a close watch upon his health by periodic visits to Sir Francis Galton's anthropometric laboratory at South Kensington. He did brilliantly in October, taking first class Honours in Zoölogy, and being first in the Second Class in Honours in Geology. But December saw him ill again, a cold caught on Christmas Eve ending in hæmorrhage. Dr. Collins examined him, found no tuberculosis, and declared his prospects of long life greater now than three years before, but suggested a month's holiday at Uppark. He was back in London, and at work again, within the month. This year his summer holidays also were spent at Uppark. He returned to study for the Fellowship Diploma of the College of Preceptors, and—with his prospective wife and mother-in-law—to move to Haldon Road, West Hill, Wandsworth, in preparation for his marriage in October. He was undoubtedly deeply in love, and the affection of the young couple may have seemed the securer because it was based upon intimate knowledge and comradeship rather than romantic passion. But indeed there were profound differences of temperament and outlook which were to lead later to a disruption.

He has written of himself as being in these days a hard and crude young man, and certainly he took his unconventional opinions, social, political, and religious, seriously enough to feel himself barred from wide areas of scholastic employment. "I am exceedingly glad to hear of your vigorous Atheism," he had written to Davies in 1887. "It behoves us who deny, to make it as clear to the world as we can for the good of ourselves and the world, that we think in this way. I am toiling now to attain the day when it will be possible for me to shake off the last vestiges of convention, and I still hope to see it before I die." This was the path he was treading, seeking to be himself to the utmost possible degree, to see the world with a vision at once independent and clear, definite and detailed, very honest and, for all its individuality,

essentially self-denying. Not for him "that too common human failing of attempting to weave all one's characteristic failings into an ideal. Because I am rank and reedy, is that any reason why I should assert Jean Jacques to be the best specimen of *homo sapiens,* because I am prone to lapse into abuse, that I should accept Swift as entirely good, or because the recording angel scrawls insincere over my page, that I should shout and dance in the triumph of Benvenuto Cellini? But it is too much a feature of modern thought to echo the fox who thought the grapes were sour: we are anæmic, small chested; let us abuse carnality and exalt the Spirit. Our memories fail often, our wits slumber like gorged snakes—let us then revile clearness as superficial and insinuate profundity; we are poor—power and riches are vulgar. Before all things in a practical age, let the Ideal be something which we can without too serious exertion attain."

This was written in 1888 to Miss Healey. He expressed the trend of his development more elaborately in a letter written a year later to Simmons, combating a "heresy" into which the latter was supposed to have fallen. "You yearn for *moral* not *mental* development, want to be a *sincere* man rather than a *clever* one, and feel that even a comfortable post and duties faithfully discharged without the element of exalted sentiment means to a large extent a life wasted, and so forth. My dear old chappie, man isn't a double-barrelled gun, so that you can let out with one-half of him and not the other! If you depreciate (a) the intellectual, and (b) the worldly activity, you pave the way for (a) well meaning and quite mischievous actions or (b) sentimental and unconscious selfishness. In other words, perfect sincerity without wisdom or toil is as foolish a thing as salvation by faith. There is no doubt as to the sincerity of a cabbage, it is as perfect as its freedom for sin. Knowledge, the power of matured resolution, a store of energy; these make men glorious souls if you will read your prophetic Carlyle aright. That splutter of *'sincerity,' 'a fixed faith,'*

'*honest sincere men*—NOT CLEVER' is not our prophet's teaching. It is a kind of Little Bethel gloss on his writings. It means fluctuating round a formula, and saying you are immovable; it means prevarication and convenient conventionality posing as truthfulness, selfish isolation pretending to be moral exclusiveness, foolish following of hastily assumed 'principles.' You can't be truly sincere by resolution and self-government. Sincerity is essentially internal harmony, and thank God, Simmons, if you find yourself not as many men are, a half-hearted compromise of godliness, self-deception and deliberate humbug. Sincerity is a gift—all the rest depends on your wisdom and energy, whether your sincerity be a barren stick or no. Become efficient, become powerful to the limit of your possibilities, and then do your best to shape the world in your hands to the form your heart desires.

"There are two deadly sins. Vanity and meanness—shun these more than adultery, murder, or parricide. Make your brain and body a cunning instrument in the hand of your will, and dissociate your mind from sympathy with the weapon. Disabuse yourself of the illusion of identity, associate yourself with the great humanity of making, teaching, conquering the dead world. Be an enthusiast devoid of sentiment, a dumb prophet like Moses, a materialist in earnest. This is the true gospel of faithfully your friend, H. G. Wells."

He passed the College of Preceptors Fellowship examination at the end of the year with honours in two subjects, gaining the Doreck Scholarship prize of £20 for Theory and Practice of Education. It gave him, he has said, satisfaction to beat the regular university teachers in their own examinations; he saw himself as at war with the world, and these were intimations of victory.

The impression he made upon his colleagues is recalled by Mr. J. M. Lowson, who joined him as assistant in the autumn of 1892, following the removal of the Tutorial

Classes to larger quarters in Red Lion Square. He found Wells "a slim, fair, alert young fellow of twenty-seven, with bright observant eyes, a thin wisp of a moustache, a quiet, easy, pleasant mode of speech," very friendly and considerate in initiating him into the unfamiliar routine. "At first Wells conducted all the classes while I assisted with the practical work, but very soon he handed over the botanical work to me. He was an excellent lecturer and demonstrator, genial and unaffected in his dealings with the students and always anticipating and ready to meet their difficulties." Following the evening classes the two men would walk together from Holborn to Charing Cross, there to talk over a glass of ale while waiting for their trains. It was during these talks that Lowson realised the convinced and independent nature of Wells's political, religious, and social views, his readiness to give expression to them, and something of his literary ambitions and active efforts.

He was now at the climax of his career as a teacher, earning by sheer hard labour at tutoring, private coaching and visiting-teaching an income seemingly quite sufficient to set him well beyond any threat of poverty. He was, too, breaking tentatively into print. His first real success was Frank Harris's acceptance in February 1891 of *The Rediscovery of the Unique* for the *Fortnightly Review*. At once he wrote to Simmons: "Is this the dove with a sprig of bay? Is it poor Pilgrim's first glimpse of the white and shining city? Or a mirage?" He added that long ago he would "have abandoned all this kind of thing if it had not been for the moral support of your believing in me." That Simmons's helpfulness was practical as well as moral appears in other letters. "Do read this through," Wells begs in one, "correct all the spelling—mark any parts in pencil you don't like—jerk in any suggestions—hunt up the address of the *Universal Review* and what they say to contributors—write any advice you can give—and in fact sparkle up and do the correct thing by it." And again: "I shall burn the damned thing if it comes back again so you had better address it for return to yourself at

Southampton and never let me hear of it again until it succeeds."

He followed up his success by sending Harris that spring an article on *The Universe Rigid,* and in June was invited to call at the *Fortnightly* office—his first personal contact with any literary celebrity. It was a not unamusing encounter. Wells hardly knew what was expected, or indeed how to dress for the occasion. After long thought, he decided that a morning coat and silk hat would best fit the case, and proceeded to furbish up these rather shabby items of his wardrobe. The silk hat in particular offered difficulties, but a wet cloth achieved an admirable polish. Thus it was a dignified if rather weedy figure which presented itself at the office, to be kept waiting a considerable time—a blow to the pride of the young author, who evidently expected an immediate welcome. He was ushered at last into the presence, to find Harris fortified behind a vast table with busy minions on either hand. Heart beating, Wells was approaching across what seemed an endless expanse of floor, when suddenly he saw that the polished portions of his hat had completely lost their lustre, that the drying surface was ragged and curling. And as he half-halted, appalled, Harris, staring hard at this immensely visible object, flung the manuscript forward on the table with a gesture, his waxed moustaches trembling, and demanded, richly Irish: "Before Gar-r-r-d, what's this bloody article *about*! What's the sense of it? What's it trying to *say*?..." It was, Wells recalls, an outline of a four-dimensional time-space system, "pretty good," he thinks, for those days. It was set up in type, but never published.

In 1891 and 1892 he was able to place a few brief scientific essays with the *Gentleman's Magazine,* and early in 1893 the *Globe,* which was easy to satisfy because it paid little, printed *The Noises of Animals,* in which a body of plain fact is brushed with that light-footed nonsense characteristic of much of his early journalism. Most of his writing at this period, however, appeared in the educational journals. Here again Wells suggests that they were easy of

access because they paid so badly; still, he was quick to make his mark. If the majority of his contributions afforded little scope to display the more obvious literary qualities, he was certainly learning the valuable lesson of direct statement, and in such shorter articles as *The Subtle Examinee* and *The Examiner Examined* he gave free rein to an engaging whimsicality. While working for Briggs he edited the *University Correspondent,* the organ of the Correspondence College.

Yet if Wells wrote for the educational journals partly because they would print him, he must not be regarded only as a teacher seeking to be a writer, or a writer compelled to be a teacher; he was in fact a teacher seriously concerned with educational purposes and methods. For four or five years at least he accepted teaching as a satisfying career; he wrote in his spare time, but did not regard authorship as the only desirable livelihood. He had seen what teaching could be in the hands of a J. V. Milne, and he was always anxious to set the ideal against the less inspiring reality, and to declare that teachers should live to teach, not merely teach to live. The majority of his earlier articles—to 1893—are those of a teacher commenting upon his chosen profession, interested in it as a human activity, and anxious to keep it so. At every point he opposed the academic spirit, seeking to evoke intelligence and imagination. The aim of "every university examination teacher worth his salt was," he said, to defeat that "type of examinee, unfortunately only too common, whose one idea seems to be to get as many degrees and diplomas and as little knowledge as possible," and to do so by presenting to him "nothing but what unavoidably challenges comparison and thought, and points certainly and unequivocally towards the wider laws of the subject." [1] In other words, by forcing him to exercise intelligence. He was censorious of the teacher who failed at his job for reasons within his power of correction, and did not hesi-

[1] Preface, *Text-Book of Biology,* Part II.

tate to attack the educational mandarins of the day. In the same spirit he denounced the unfettered freedom of the private school to be as incompetent as its proprietor's conscience would permit, and by doing so brought a protest from Mr. Milne. Wells replied in a private letter: "Long before I knew you I had my grudge against the particular variety of private school of which I honestly believe you live in ignorance. I have suffered badly as the son of not very well-to-do and rather illiterate parents at the hands of these scholastic pirates, and I do not think that I could refrain from the chance of sticking a knife under the ribs of this system of fraud if every friend I had stood on the opposite side." He continued in a second letter: "It is what I know of this indiscriminate herding of boys and their abandonment without supervision or occupation to their own imaginations in these cheap private schools that is the worst count against them. I admit that things have been bad in public schools, but a public school is a fixed mark, a tangible thing upon which a scandal may be fixed. A headmaster is a responsible man in a public school; in a private school at present he is responsible only to his conscience if he has one, and to that chaotic but ill-informed body his parents." He looked forward to the extinction of the old-fashioned private academy not as socialist but as educationist.

If he was, as he told Mr. Milne, injuring his prospects by attacking the private school, that was not the only source of trouble between himself and the *metier* of schoolmaster. When he became a science student, he has said, he did not understand that both school and laboratory were "ruled by academic cliques; that I should have entered either only to live a life of embittered obscurity... like a man swearing with his head in a bag." [1] Something of the process of realisation may be gathered, if indirectly, from an article on *The Scholastic Frame of Mind,* printed in 1894.

[1] *My Lucky Moment.*

It begins in apparent seriousness, it ends in open irony. First it suggests the teacher's need of a complete lack of modesty. "So paramount is the teacher's need of being cocksure of himself, that it is even open to question whether the study of the science and art of education by a teacher may not be regarded as a demoralising pursuit." Next it urges that the teacher must regard his classes as composed of so many "scholastic units" to be pushed through examinations at high percentages. Only at the end of the second instalment, which defines the scholastic frame of mind as "an utterly unsympathetic one, and its pedestal a powerful self-complacency," does the first active ironical note appear with the admission: "It is of course just possible that some flaw, some infinitesimal paradox, may have escaped our careful reasoning. However, it is hardly reasonable to expect a writer to pick holes in his own production." Thenceforward satire is set free. The perfect teacher, of whom Ruskin is the crowning example, is declared to be no man but a "pedagogic passion," substituting portentous dictation for reasonable explanation, and quite indifferent to the subject taught save as the raw material of his activity. His logical outcome is "impalement, the stake, and the cross." "A good teacher must be self-complacent, neither reformer, artist, lover, scientific investigator, nor philosopher, but teacher, having but one passion, the pedagogic passion, the passion of 'Now-listen-to-me' ruling over his scholastic life.... So far as he or she is modest, sympathetic, or distracted by other pursuits, so far will his or her work fall short of success, and his or her condition of the true scholastic frame of mind." If indeed this was Wells's dominant impression of the world of teachers and teaching—and a mind of his power does not turn to expansive satire merely for a passing whim—there can be no doubt that even had not circumstances forced the issue he would sooner or later, and probably before long, have broken out of this narrow way into the wider world of authorship. For always he had been a humanist, concerned primarily with men and women, and the means towards a

fuller and finer individual and social life, and if teaching could not forward humanism then he must have done with teaching.

Nevertheless his interest in education and his faith in it as fundamental to any true humanism have never wavered.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JOURNALIST

§ 1

THE BREAKDOWN which ended his days as a teacher came in May 1893. It was inevitable. The continuous exhaustion of lecturing, coaching, and writing was having a cumulative effect upon a frail physique. All that winter—prolonged severe frosts made it particularly trying—he had been working harder than usual on the second part of the *Text-Book of Biology,* and, in collaboration with R. A. Gregory, on *Honours Physiography.*

There was, too, an additional mental strain. Both he and his wife were realising that their marriage had been a mistake. Her photographs show her a beautiful and charming person, and she was distinguished by a certain quiet dignity; but she wanted security and peace in her world and he was an incarnate restlessness with a wayward and abnormal nervous energy. He puzzled and distressed her—the situation is reflected in more than one of his novels. The affection between them was great; to this day they are loyal friends; but passion spluttered and passed. Shelley was a great star in Wells's sky, and most of us are disposed to sail by our stars. He was already in love with another woman, who, he felt, recognised his gifts and sympathised with his desire to achieve wider horizons.

Amy Catherine Robbins came to the Tutorial Classes towards the end of 1893, meaning to take a degree and earn her living as a teacher. Wells has described their meeting in

his introduction to *The Book of Catherine Wells.* In addition to class work he gave her individual and private tuition, and they became friendly. Soon, he says, "this new pupil had become the embodiment of all the understanding and quality I desired in life. We talked—over our frogs and rabbits.... Our friendship grew swiftly beyond the bounds of friendship and I was amazed to find that she could care for me as much as I did for her."

Matters had reached this point when the blow fell. He was hurrying late one afternoon down Villiers Street towards Charing Cross District Station, carrying a heavy bag of rock specimens, when he was seized by a fit of coughing which ended, as he struggled into the Station, in hæmorrhage. He reached home, but in the early hours of the morning it came on again and continued intermittently until midday—the worst of all his attacks. "I almost sent in p.p.c. cards on Thursday morning, but it occurred to me in time that they were out of fashion," he told Miss Healey, and added "no more teaching for me for ever." He wrote in the same strain to others. His teaching days were over; his one hope now was his pen. Perhaps the wish was partly father to the thought, for certainly he was not cast down about it. Legend tends to portray Wells at this point as in complete despair, without money or hope; he realises his destiny, waves his magic pen, and is forthwith a successful author! The truth is less dramatic, for he informed Dr. Collins: "Happily I have a sufficient reserve of funds accumulated since 1889 to give me no great worry for the next year or so, and in the interim I think I can see my way to doing enough to ensure a sufficient income for my mild requirements.... My little book has had some very good reviews, and I know where to sell an article or so with some certainty now. I do not fear not being able to get along."

In this mood he went to Eastbourne as soon as he could travel, there to rest and recover and "rejuvenesce by throwing myself perhaps with artificial zeal into the innocent

pursuits of seaside childhood."[1] Yet his thoughts, as he lay on the sun-baked sands and let the light and heat soak into him, cannot have been completely happy. There came relapses, and with them moods of disgust when he saw in store for himself "nothing but a long perspective of relapses to the inevitable end." Whatever he might hope to write in the future, he had not been conspicuously successful in the past. The problem was what to write not for ultimate fame but for immediate acceptance, and it was curiously solved. Daily he would walk up by the cliff and along the parade to the tiny tobacco shop and the twopenny circulating library, and one day from the latter he took out, casually enough, a novel, *When a Man's Single,* by J. M. Barrie. In its pages he found the hint he needed. As one of the characters spun articles from walking-sticks, door-knobs, and the like, so he must write agreeably of what lay to hand, not upon big formidable themes. Forthwith he wrote *On the Art of Staying at the Seaside,* a humorous account of Eastbourne and its visitants, and sent it to the *Pall Mall Gazette.* It was accepted and printed, and the editor asked for more. Wells could not have made a happier hit, for the *Pall Mall* publications had just then entered upon a brief but golden day under the ownership of W. W. Astor, and were being run regardless of expense, to the great profit of a happy band of brilliant journalists. By the end of July he was back in London, and had made the acquaintance of the editor of the *Gazette,* the handsome and charming Harry Cust. From September onwards he was a regular contributor, and a month or two later could write to Mr. Milne: "I am healthy, and living just now in a kind of opulent indolence. The *Pall Mall Gazette* has seen fit to appreciate the pleasant vices of my style, and I have some enjoyable times writing foolishness. I came once very close to hæmorrhage in October but I am getting away from that again, and I delude myself with the fancy that I may yet be sufficiently sure of the sale of copy to cut adrift from

[1] Letter to Elizabeth Healey.

London at last and go somewhere where colds cease from troubling in the winter."

In August he and his wife moved from Haldon Road to Sutton in Surrey. They lived there until their separation at the end of the year. It was arranged that she should divorce him, and in due course he married Miss Robbins. The first Mrs. Wells, also, presently remarried happily. Necessarily pain was caused on both sides, but it was, Wells asserts, "a perfectly civilised affair."

From the practical point of view, his second marriage was a reckless, indeed unjustifiable, venture. The terms healthy and opulent quoted above were highly relative. He might be better, but even so he did not expect to outlive the century, and Miss Robbins was regarded as similarly doomed. This it was that finally led them to snatch what happiness they might, although no doubt that heightening of the emotions which frequently accompanies the tuberculous condition also played its part in their decision. "We were the most desperate of lovers," he has written: "we launched ourselves upon our life together with less than fifty pounds between us and absolute disaster, and we pulled through. We never begged nor borrowed, we never cheated, and we worked and paid our way first into a position of security and then to real prosperity. And I seem to remember now that we did it with a very great deal of gaiety." [1] They set themselves against the current wisdom of the world, he says, and they won.

Their first home was in lodgings in Mornington Place, and later in Mornington Road. Living itself was in those days a precarious adventure; they had to fight their way up from frank poverty, and for a number of months Wells's friends saw little of him. Soon they moved from these cramped quarters—the single sitting room was also his workroom—to Tusculum Villa, Eardsley Road, Sevenoaks, and again before long to Lynton, Maybury Road, Woking, not far from Henley's house.

[1] Introduction to *Book of Catherine Wells.*

§ 2

He was, by now, no longer one of Huxley's but one of Henley's "young men." The year 1894 was especially notable for prolific journalism. During it he contributed actually scores of unsigned articles and tales to the press in addition to the matter to be found in *Certain Personal Matters, Select Conversations,* and *The Stolen Bacillus.* These neglected items may not be worth reprinting but they have a plasticity and ease which are noteworthy, and display an unforced humour, a happy soaring over the plain statement of fact or mere absurdity, which distinguish them from the usual informative article of their day. Cust welcomed them, and introduced Wells to his friends and fellow-editors. Among the latter was the late Lewis Hind, editor of the *Pall Mall Budget,* who gave Wells his first publicity as a story-writer, practically all his earlier work having been anonymous. Both Wells and Hind have affirmed that the latter first suggested that the former should write short stories; but in fact Wells was contributing them to *Truth* and the *St. James's Gazette* at an earlier date. It was towards the summer of 1894 that the *Budget,* hitherto a weekly edition of the *Gazette,* became a separate paper with a number of special features, among which Wells's *Single Sitting Stories* were prominent; they were printed one a week and illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan. In the series appeared most of the tales now to be found in *The Stolen Bacillus,* and some others never reprinted. The blow to Wells's income must have been considerable when the weekly ceased publication in the following March, but now a number of papers were ready to print whatever he wrote for them. Hind or Cust had introduced him to Marriott-Watson, and Marriott-Watson to Henley, whose friendship and good opinion opened to him the columns of the *National Observer* and later the *New Review,* and gave him a literary standing and a new and influential circle of acquaintances.

Frank Harris had not forgotten *The Rediscovery of the Unique,* and from the autumn of 1894 onward Wells contributed unsigned reviews and middle articles to the *Saturday Review,* now owned by Harris. He also wrote for *Nature,* and early in 1895 was for a few weeks dramatic critic on the *Pall Mall Gazette.* He told Simmons: "If only I could get about 32 hours in a day it would be very well indeed with me.... It makes my heart ache to see the educational papers so dull without me, and to be unable to get anything done for them."

But with all this he was working for the future. In late 1893, or early 1894, after his first meeting with Henley, he had again taken up *The Chronic Argonauts* and shaped it into a story recognisably related to, though notably different from, *The Time Machine.* This appeared irregularly in the *National Observer* from March to June 1894, as a series of unsigned articles bearing various titles and no indications of continuity. The *Observer* perished, and the monthly *New Review* rose from its ashes. Henley wanted a striking serial story, and he offered Wells £100 to expand the story of the Time Traveller. A fortnight of hard work saw it written practically in its present form.[1] In December 1894 Wells wrote to Miss Healey: "You may be interested to know that our ancient *Chronic Argonauts* of the *Science Schools Journal* has at last become a complete story and will appear as a serial in the *New Review* for January. It's my trump card and if it does not come off very much I shall know my place for the rest of my career." He knew the story to be exceptional, the best he could do; if that failed why should he anticipate success beyond? Were he mistaken in his estimate of it then he was also mistaken in his estimate of himself.

Nevertheless he did not wait upon the verdict. By the time the first instalment appeared he was already at work upon the tale which became ultimately *The Island of Dr. Moreau.* He gave so much time to it that in February he

[1] See Appendix I.

was in financial difficulties, and had to concentrate temporarily on articles. He went back to *Moreau* to reshape it. "I began the beggar again from the very first page and set him up quite different and much better. Since then I've hacked him about a good deal. He's far from ship-shape yet." [1] When that was completed he plunged into *The Wonderful Visit,* which he was able to sell on the strength of the first sixty pages. *Moreau* was rejected by the first publishers to whom it was offered, but they undertook instead a volume of short stories, *The Stolen Bacillus.*

Wells was receiving recognition on every hand. The influential Stead, in a comment in the March *Review of Reviews* on the third instalment of *The Time Machine,* informed the world: "H. G. Wells is a man of genius," and in April he reiterated this opinion. In June appeared *Select Conversations with an Uncle,* a reprint of matter from the *Pall Mall Gazette.* The *Athenæum* found it "portentously foolish" and sped that classic arrow of scorn: "The book has a very nice cover," but Richard Le Gallienne tossed his golden aureole and murmured of Charles Lamb. A day later came *The Time Machine,* to achieve instant acclaim. It was talked about. It sold. The *Bookman* in its August number interviewed Wells as a coming man. In September *The Wonderful Visit* and in November *The Stolen Bacillus and other Incidents,* were received with an almost unanimous praise. T. P. O'Connor, Jerome, and Arthur Pearson were among his early supporters. Now the popular magazines began to clamour for his work, and the way was smooth before him. By the end of the year both *The Wheels of Chance* and *The War of the Worlds* were in hand, and he had decided to give up journalism. Actually he continued to review for the *Saturday Review* and *Nature* even into 1897, but thenceforward his contributions to newspapers, however numerous and extensive, were to be those of a novelist writing for the press, not of a journalist who also wrote novels in his spare time.

[1] Letter to A. T. Simmons.

§ 3

Thus, at the age of twenty-nine, Wells found himself set free. His path, even in the last few years, had not been an easy one, but he was now secure as a writer, and beyond any doubt of the brilliant imagination, the warm humanity, the sheer mental power, creatively stirring within him. Intellectually and financially he had transcended all the limits of that narrow class into which he had been born: he was free for ever from the degradation of the drapery, from the lying and cheating and servility inherent in every form of trade; he had shattered the academic constraints of the world of education, had won his way into a sphere of almost boundless possibilities, wherein a man, regardless of origin, might meet on equal terms with persons of every class and type. There is probably no life, he himself has said, so free and full as that of the successful author.

But if he was free it was as the direct outcome of a continuous rebellion against circumstance, against all the prohibitions of social usage and tradition. Like Mr. Polly he had discovered in his own experience that "if the world does not please you, you can change it. Determine to alter it at any price, and you can change it altogether." In the process he had come up harshly against more than one article of the current social code; forced sometimes to submit, but never to consent.

Thus in himself he had demonstrated the possibility of change, complete and radical, but even beyond his personal affairs his studies, his scientific studies in particular, had been peculiarly directed to show him Change as the essential and universal fact. Read again his account of what his three years at the Normal School of Science had given him. Evolution was very much in the air from the 'seventies to the 'nineties; at South Kensington under Huxley it was the atmosphere itself!

And beyond being both a universal fact and a personal

possibility, change seemed to him the most urgent necessity. He had seen the world from the underside, in bankrupt shop, servants' hall, drapery, living on a guinea a week in London, and though he himself had escaped he could not forget—he did not wish to forget—that for the majority it remained a trap of frustration. Change, intelligently planned and directed towards the greatest possible freedom and happiness, was his aim. The means was clear to him: for the individual, education (his own Jacob's ladder); for society, again education, pointing to some form of communal organisation and control. "Individualism in ethics, socialism in economy," he expressed his creed. For the rest, the determination and the courage to overcome the inertia and cowardice of tradition.

So in Wells, before he was thirty, we discern implanted and in active growth all the seeds of what, in later years, he was to become and to achieve.

BOOK TWO

THE NOVELIST

1895-1914

Cooper Union Library

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SCIENTIFIC ROMANCER

§ 1

WELLS came on the literary scene at a fortunate moment. The older Victorians were mostly dead or moribund. Both Meredith and Hardy had done their best work as novelists. The secure and the rising stars of the library counters—Hall Caine, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Jerome, Zangwill, Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope, Barrie—were none of them of the first rank, and Hudson, James, and George Moore, if known to connoisseurs, had yet to wait for a fuller recognition. Æstheticism was tottering when the indiscretions of Wilde dealt its death-blow. The hour called for a genius who would weave together the threads the younger, more distinctively realist writers were spinning—the romantic realism of Kipling and Frank Harris, the purposive realism of Bernard Shaw, the intellectual realism of Gissing, the Cockney realism (the so-called "New Humour") of Pett Ridge and W. W. Jacobs. Wells did this; his early short stories and romances displayed evident affinities with them all. His specifically scientific basis was in fact incidental, the fruit of his early training; his natural gifts as an artist were rather to be discerned in the special qualities of his imagination—its exuberant inventiveness, its visual penetration, its powerful and relentless actuality.

The truth was that from the first he wished to be a novelist in the restricted meaning of the term, but he was highly conscious of the obstacles to be overcome by a man

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of his views and temperament, especially in regard to what, writing to Miss Healey in 1888, he termed "the sentimental distortion of this important factor of human life called love. The code of rules whereby two young people have to meet each other, go through all sorts of ceremonial and finally pass under the yoke which exists in this effete state of humanity, is one of the most ghastly difficulties that the ambitious writer of stories has to encounter. For myself, who am a doubter and contemner of almost all the amenities of social intercourse, there is a simply frightful temptation to be glaringly improper in what I write; I am one of those beings who, with the simplest and purest of lives, have the most shocking scale of morals believable." He was willing to bide his time, also, because as he declared in 1897 in an article on *The Novels of Mr. George Gissing,* he conceived novel-writing as no job for a man under, say, thirty. "Work essentially imaginative or essentially superficial a man of three and twenty may do as well as a man of forty; romance of all sorts, the fantastic story, the ideal novel, even the novel of manners; all these are work for the young, perhaps even more than the old. But to see life clearly and whole, to see and represent it with absolute self-detachment, with absolute justice, above all with evenly balanced sympathy, is an ambition permitted only to a man full-grown."

Thus, from the days of the *Science Schools Journal* forward, he turned, for the time without demur, to the multitudinous suggestions of scientific discovery. As a student at South Kensington, he saw, with the effect of a new vision, man's self-importance shrink in the biological, geological, and astronomical perspectives. In his boyhood, speculation about the future seemed all but a joke; one might talk, but the Day of Judgment was the ultimate fact. His early reading had opened his eyes to realities, yet it was almost as a gesture of defiance that in an essay on *The Past and Future of the Human Race,* read to the Science Schools Debating Society in 1885, he sketched with prophetic boldness the

features of the Man of the Year Million.[1] The deep impression made upon his receptive imagination by the wide range of his scientific studies appears in *The Rediscovery of the Unique,* his first ponderable essay. It is notable as marking his earliest systematic realisation of an attitude to the universe. Its burden is the uniqueness of all being, a doubt of the reality of classification, of the ability of the logical faculty to arrive at any understanding of ultimate truths. Here is the self-discovery of the artist, who above all men is concerned with being in its uniqueness, as the scientist with being in its similarities. Yet true to his training he clung to science as the only illuminant, though with one—how tremendous!—reservation. "Science is a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room—in moments of devotion, a temple—and that his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated—darkness still." Darkness still—out of which might sweep to man's, to earth's, destruction or transformation who knew what unique phenomena? That was the essence of the mood in which he looked about him and saw men taking so much for granted. He could take nothing for granted. What they saw as static he saw as essentially mutable; man was but one species among many, one episode in a story whose ending none could tell. Change as the first and final fact stimulated him not only intellectually but imaginatively; he was moved by it. He saw the boundless possibilities of change looming above and beckoning to the blind inertia

[1] This essay, completely rewritten but not substantially changed, was printed in 1893 as *The Man of the Year Million;* it appears in *Certain Personal Matters* as *Of a Book Unwritten.*

of mankind. Where others asked Why? he asked Why not? He was the sceptical interrogator.

The period stimulated him to the function. The decade between the first and second jubilees was marked by a widespread superficially confident conservatism, beneath which profound changes threatened and slowly gained ground. The type of story it especially amused him to write was, he has said, "the vivid realisation of some disregarded possibility in such a way as to comment on the false securities and fatuous self-satisfaction of everyday life."[1] From 1887 onward he was querying mankind's complacent sovereignty of the future and ingeniously suggesting its downfall (as in *A Vision of the Past* and *The Extinction of Man,* the latter an essay reprinted in *Certain Personal Matters,* and interesting as embodying ideas later used in *The Time Machine* and *The War in the Air,* and in two short stories, *The Sea Raiders* and *The Empire of the Ants*). All the earlier romances—*The Time Machine, The Wonderful Visit, The Island of Dr. Moreau, The Invisible Man, The War of the Worlds, When the Sleeper Wakes*—and the greater number of the short stories, were conceived in this mood of questioning inspired by this sense of inexhaustible possibility. Essentially they are the offspring of the intellectual imagination, born of ideas. Wells's mind teemed with such ideas. As a short story writer he had only to let his thoughts play about "almost anything" to find himself presently "peering into remote and mysterious worlds ruled by an order logical indeed but other than our common sanity."[2] So with the longer tales. The origin of *The Wonderful Visit* was Ruskin's remark that if an angel appeared on earth some one would be sure to shoot it; that of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* a surgical speculation by Wells himself in the *Saturday Review,* the trial of Oscar Wilde only coming in time to inform an amended version with the reminder that "humanity is but animal roughhewn to a rea-

[1] *An Experiment in Illustration.*
[2] Introduction, *The Country of the Blind.*

A Martian

(INSCRIBED IN MR. RALPH STRAUS'S COPY OF
"THE WAR OF THE WORLDS")

sonable shape and in perpetual internal conflict between instinct and injunction." [1] *The War of the Worlds* sprang from Frank Wells's suggestion of beings from another planet dropping suddenly out of the sky into peaceful Surrey scenery. The idea of "Cavorite" was intended to serve for a series of short stories; the journey to the moon and the Selenite satire were later conceptions.

The technical aspects of these tales fascinated him. He took justifiable pride in their plausibility, though necessarily he had sometimes to admit defeat. *The Invisible Man* contained one insurmountable difficulty, he acknowledged to Arnold Bennett: "Any alteration of the refractive index of the eye lenses would make vision impossible. Without such alteration the eyes would be visible as glassy globules. And for vision it is also necessary that there should be visual purple behind the retina and an opaque cornea and iris. On these lines you would get a very effective short story but nothing more." Yet he refused consistently to be regarded as merely a story-teller; though it is evident that the sweeping destruction occurring in many of the tales appealed to something fundamental in him,[2] he protested strongly against the inclination to see in (say) *Dr. Moreau* only a "festival of horrors." Each of his books pointed a moral: *The Time Machine* was meant to suggest "the responsibility of men to mankind," *The Wonderful Visit* "the littleness, the narrow horizon, of people's ordinary lives by bringing into sharp contrast with typical characters a being who is free from the ordinary human limitations"; *Dr. Moreau* pointed to "the bestial aspect of human life," while Graham, the Sleeper, symbolised a humanitarianism which seemed to Wells to have been falling into an ever deeper slumber from the 'sixties to the 'nineties. *The Invisible Man* and *The*

[1] Atlantic Edition, Volume 2, Preface.

[2] "I'm doing the dearest little serial for Pearson's new magazine, in which I completely wreck and destroy Woking—killing my neighbours in painful and eccentric ways—then proceed via Kingston and Richmond to London, which I sack, selecting South Kensington for feats of peculiar atrocity." Letter to Elizabeth Healey.

War of the Worlds illustrated the dangers of power without moral control, the development of the intelligence at the expense of human sympathy.[1]

§ 2

Now in all these tales the circumstances were clearly primary, the characters, though realistic, little more than puppets to display these circumstances. Prendick, Griffin, Bedford, and the Time Traveller could all have changed places without altering their adventures. Presumably it is this lack of the human element which has led some critics to dismiss the scientific romances as "really only books for boys." That Wells regarded them as more than this has been noted, but it is possible on quite other grounds than his to set them much higher than that contemptuous phrase suggests. In them the scientist may conceive, the moralist direct, but the artist writes. What sets Wells's romances apart from all other such stories is their sheer literary power. Some difficult distinctions are involved, but the fact is that while the basis of the tales, and the consideration of contingencies, are largely intellectual, the final visualisation is the artist's—synthetic not analytic. He raises scientific romance to a plane where its essential difference from the novel is one of subject rather than process; the creative imagination is no less active, only its inspiration happens to be not life but hypothesis.

Some of the most striking qualities of these stories frankly do derive from the scientist rather than the artist, most notably perhaps that detachment from the normal human standpoint which pervades tale after tale, and is directly productive of his familiar ruthlessness in following a premise to its logical conclusion. This dissociation from humanity is most obviously illustrated in the pain-steeped pages of *The Island of Dr. Moreau,* in the casual burning and slaying of

[1] *What I Believe* and *H. G. Wells, Esq., B.Sc.*

The War of the Worlds, but it is even more striking, because so individual and so wanton, in *The Invisible Man,* that "study of human egotism in relation to exceptional ability." [1] Many critics consider this the finest of the scientific romances. But certainly this one aspect is nowhere so compactly and powerfully present as in the serene and terrible detachment of *The Star*: "So the star, with the wan moon in its wake, marched across the Pacific, trailed the thunderstorms like the hem of a robe, and the growing tidal wave that toiled behind it, frothing and eager, poured over island and island, and swept them clear of men: until that wave came at last—in a blinding light and with the breath of a furnace, swift and terrible it came—a wall of water, fifty feet high, roaring hungrily, upon the long coasts of Asia, and swept inland across the plains of China. For a space the star, hotter now and larger and brighter than the sun in its strength, showed with pitiless brilliance the wide and populous country; towns and villages with their pagodas and trees, roads, wide cultivated fields, millions of sleepless people staring in helpless terror at the incandescent sky; and then, low and growing, came the murmur of the flood. And thus it was with millions of men that night—a flight nowhither, with limbs heavy with heat and breath fierce and scant, and the flood like a wall, swift and white behind. And then death."

But, conversely, it is the imagination of the artist which provides a triumphant power of realism and an inexhaustible exuberance of invention unsurpassed in work of this type. (The burning of the Experimental Farm in *The Food of the Gods* is a case in point, unfailing in incident, in vividness, in gusto.) It is this vitality which populates earth and stars and sea with strange irrelevant creations, from the evil tentaculate creatures of the lunar sea to that unforgettable "limbless thing with a horrible face... immensely strong and in infuriating pain," which for days "travelled in a rollicking way like a porpoise swimming" about Dr.

[1] *H. G. Wells, Esq., B.Sc.*

Moreau's island. The realism is too pervasive to illustrate by example; it seems rooted in a visual quality of imagination, so concrete and penetrative of detail as to grasp instantly all the facets of a given event, coupled with the ability to render the necessary factors with perfect narrative skill.[1] But what really is unique is the ability to set an angel or an Invisible Man in an English village, or some commonplace individual in the moon or the remote future, and to keep both familiar and unfamiliar on a single plane of convincing reality. This may be studied best, possibly, in the early chapters of *The Invisible Man* or *The War of the Worlds*, but it is characteristic of all his writing in this kind.

"The Voice made no answer. Whizz came a flint, apparently out of the air, and missed Mr. Marvel's shoulder by a hair's breadth. Mr. Marvel, turning, saw a flint jerk up into the air, trace a complicated path, hang for a moment, and then fall at his feet with almost invisible rapidity. He was too amazed to dodge. Whizz it came, and ricocheted from a bare toe into the ditch. Mr. Thomas Marvel jumped a foot, and howled aloud. Then he started to run, tripped over an unseen obstacle, and came head over heels into a sitting position. *'Now,'* said the Voice, as a third stone curved upward and hung in the air above the tramp, 'am I imagination?' "

Reading this scene as a whole one has to believe in this Invisible Man as Mr. Marvel believed. His invisibility is all but visible.

Such power of realism, when practised on the level of humanity, is of course the primary technical achievement of the novelist, and in the succession of the romances it is not

[1] The prose of these books is scarcely a considered prose; it is swift, agile, and expressive, but *fine* rather than magical; it has something of "the pitiless black and white" quality of the airless lunar landscape. When it rises to poetry, as it does again and again in the romances, it does so less because of any inherent beauty than because it adequately embodies some fundamentally poetic conception; one may instance the final vision in *The Time Machine,* the Saying of the Law in *The Island of Dr. Moreau,* the tramp through dead London in *The War of the Worlds,* the last hunting and death of the Invisible Man, some of the lunar scenes in *The First Men in the Moon,* and the end of *The Food of the Gods.*

difficult to trace a growing skill and interest in treating this aspect. It is slurred over in *The Time Machine, The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The War of the Worlds,* but there is quite admirable subsidiary characterisation in *The Wonderful Visit,* in the village scenes of *The Invisible Man,* and, later, throughout *The Food of the Gods.* The hurried attempt to work it into *When the Sleeper Wakes* perhaps accounts for the unsatisfactory relationship between Graham and Helen Wotton, which even in the amended version is not adequately defined, and indeed the book does show evident signs of haste; continuously it is explanatory where it should be dramatic. (Wells told Arnold Bennett: "There is good stuff in it, but it is a big confused disintegrating thing.") The tendency of the later romances towards the novel is obvious; *In the Days of the Comet* may as well be called one as the other. But, in fact, concurrently with the romances from 1895 onward, Wells was writing stories in which the characters themselves very largely *were* the circumstances; stories which were, that is, novels. *The Wheels of Chance* may seem no more than a sketch for a novel written under pressure (though satisfied with Hoopdriver, he realised that Jessica was much too hurriedly drawn); but *Love and Mr. Lewisham* was begun in 1896 in altogether more serious mood. This time, Wells informed Miss Healey, "it is to be an ample novel, and the Museum and the Schools and the streets, Clapham and Chelsea and so forth, are all to come in. Heaven knows when it will get done, for writing fantastic romances is one thing, and writing a novel is quite another." He intended not to let the book go until it was as good as he could make it—and he did not. Thus well before the end of the century the determination to establish himself as a novelist was clearly in the ascendant, the interest in the romance dwindling, despite the jingling of sovereigns in the pockets of protesting editors and publishers alike. He would not be restricted to one type of work, he told Arnold Bennett: "I want to write novels, and before God I *will* write novels. They are the proper stuff for my everyday

work, a methodical careful distillation of one's thoughts and sentiments and experiences and impressions. But that other stuff which you would have me doing day by day is no more to be done day by day than repartees or lyric poetry. The imagination moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform. I can assure you that I am *not* doing anything long and weird and strong in the vein of *The Time Machine* and I never intend to. I would as soon take hat and stick and start out into the street to begin a passionate love. If it comes —well and good."

He held from the first a high view of the novelist's responsibilities, asking not merely realism, a fidelity to life (even as a romancer "it is in realism, I think, that the merit of this pseudo-scientific fiction lies"), but entire seriousness in treatment and outlook. "Assuredly your stuff is the stuff people want," he wrote from Woking to one close friend and fellow novelist, "but I do not see that you have thrown any clear light on The Fundamental Problems of Existence."

Seven years later, in 1902, he addressed the same person in similar terms, incidentally revealing his own point of view very plainly: "You take this little girl, you underfeed her, whack her about and all that—she sleeps in the open with louty boys and all the rest of it—and you try to persuade people that all this can go on without any physical dwarfing or moral danger at all. In which case there's no earthly reason why one shouldn't laugh heartily at all of it. Moreover out of sheer mischief you make a dead set at the people who want to prevent adults trading in the labour of poor little kids. You've got no business to do that. No novel is amusement merely; yours, whatever you intend, are not. To many people they supply ideas, they are probably as widely read as Rowntree's *Poverty* or Charles Booth's amazing books, and probably do as much to influence people when, at elections and so forth, they have in their amateurish way to settle some matter in sociology. If you, deliberately, or because you haven't studied these matters except with the idea of getting amusing copy, falsify the values and make

cruel things seem merely rough humour, and unhealthy and beastly things rather invigorating influences, I think, you know, you are—quite outside such nonsense as art and literature—a rather reprehensible person. I think you owe it to yourself to keep the wider aspect in view, while you write, more than you do, to seek truth more earnestly than you do, and to give those who are driving away at big social problems—the Webbs for example—a little attention and a little help."

His views on the novel and his position as a novelist are further expressed in letters written to Arnold Bennett about the same time. In one he assails Bennett's predilection for the French masters: "As for the Balzac theory, no! I don't hold with you any more than I do with Garnett and the Turgenev theory or with the damned old art critics and with the Michelangelo-Raphael theory. In so far as any man's work squares with the standards of any other man's work it doesn't count. All finally good work has its excellence in something which is not commensurable with anything outside itself. You not only cannot, but you must not, attempt to make a criticism by instituting comparisons or prescribing canons. No, it is *not* 'Balzac first and the rest nowhere.' Balzac is an Egyptian temple and damned dark and stuffy in places to Turgenev's Corinthian capitals, Dickens is a barn with astonishing gargoyles and the English novel like the Gothic cathedral is too big a thing for a complete specimen ever to get itself done. For my own part I am a purblind laborious intelligence exploring that cell of being called Wells and I resent your Balzac."

Then he is protesting, with assumed indignation, at the exclusion of his name from Bennett's *Fame and Fiction*: "With the people in an omnibus it would be convenient to pretend I didn't care a damn for my public reputation and acceptance, but it would be silly not to admit to you that these things are primary things in my life. I take your book therefore at first at any rate as a landscape in which I ought to figure, and I *don't* figure! ... I am an absolutely unique

figure in contemporary literature, I am relevant to the criticisms of prose writing and prose reading in more directions than any other man who writes, and to keep me out of the picture is simply to show that you have the sort of mind that cannot take in a new thing until someone else has put it to you. For example you are all wrong about the Fiction of the Popular Magazines on account of your failure to grasp ME. The *Strand Magazine* pays £125 for a short story by me and *Pearson's* £15 a thousand for *The Sea Lady* and Ray Lankester will tell you I've never jarred on the exacting sensibilities of a critical scientific mind. This has nothing to do with art, but it smashes your article.... Well, well. For me you are part of the Great Public, I perceive. I am doomed to write 'scientific' romances and short stories for you creatures of the mob, and my novels must be my private dissipation. 'Damn this Bennett!' I say with all my heart, and am, my dear Bennett, Yours ever."

Lastly he displays to his friend "the final confidence of shamelessness": "There's a quality in the worst of my so-called 'pseudo-scientific' (imbecile adjective) stuff which differentiates it from Jules Verne, *e.g.,* just as Swift is differentiated from fantasia—isn't there? There is something other than either story writing or artistic merit which has emerged through the series of my books. Something one might regard as a new system of ideas—'thought.' It's in *Anticipations,* especially Chapter IX, and it's in my Royal Institution lecture, and it's also in *The First Men in the Moon* and *The Invisible Man* and Chaffery's chapter in *Love and Mr. Lewisham.*"

But the depth of the seriousness with which he came to the writing of novels appears most clearly in his declaration that *Anticipations,* and its successors, *Mankind in the Making* and *A Modern Utopia,* were originally no more than offshoots of his aims as a novelist. (That it was the wrong sort of seriousness is not to the point.) Before he could portray the individual life he had "to study and state for my own satisfaction the social process in which we swim as fish

swim in a flood of water."[1] Naturally, being Wells, he soon exceeded his first intentions. "*Anticipations* is designed," he wrote to Miss Healey, "to undermine and destroy the monarch monogamy and respectability—and the British Empire, all under the guise of a speculation about motor cars and electrical heating. One has to go quietly in the earlier papers, but the last will be a buster." It contained in fact his first statement of the faith and morals, and attitude to life, of that figure who in many guises was to haunt, however tenuously, all his books henceforward, the New Republican. It was his first deliberate exposition of ideas fundamental to all his thinking since: the conception of the World State, the doubts of democracy, the idea of industrial necessities leading both statesmanship and socialism towards a true internationalism, the dream of an "open conspiracy"—the phrase actually occurs—to bring this about. Wells, in *Anticipations*, steadied his keel and shaped his course. The book was originally entitled *The New Prospectus*; it was at least *his* prospectus. As social analysis and social prophecy, as the work of a would-be novelist and would-be thinker, its writing marked the end of one phase in his development, the dawn of another.[2]

[1] *Mr. Wells Explains Himself.*

[2] It remains interesting, also, as prophecy already partly fulfilled. The account of twentieth-century warfare is quite remarkable in its application to 1914-1918; he described trench fighting in detail, the naval situation, the vanishing distinction between soldier and non-combatant, the collectivist organisation of the community to secure the highest productive efficiency, and the importance of the command of the air (though he was as timid with the aeroplane as with the submarine). The specialised motor ways find at least a preliminary reflection in the new arterial roads, the elimination of the horse proceeds apace, the competition between railway and motor transport follows the lines suggested, and even the proposal of moving platforms to carry pedestrians about the central city streets continues to be raised at intervals and becomes progressively less fantastic. It was, after all, of the year 2000 that he wrote, not 1930.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MAN OF LETTERS

§ 1

DURING these years, from 1895 to 1900—in fact to 1902—Wells remained a purely literary figure. His interests were not restricted, but he was very much of an invalid, and the battle for fame and fortune in this single and ever-widening field sufficed to absorb his limited energies.

The move to Woking may be said to mark his first conviction of victory. He told Simmons then that from the time he left Sutton he had rested only when ill or when the piano overhead made work impossible. But now "look at the lifetime of leisure that unfolds!" He wrote about this time an interesting unreprinted article on the sorrows and penalties besetting "the young proletarian" in his upward climb to fortune—the feeling of being at home in no environment, either the old or the new, the lack of intimate friends. "Better a little grocery, a life of sordid anxiety, love, and a tumult of children, than this Dead Sea fruit of success. It is fun to struggle, but tragedy to win." [1]

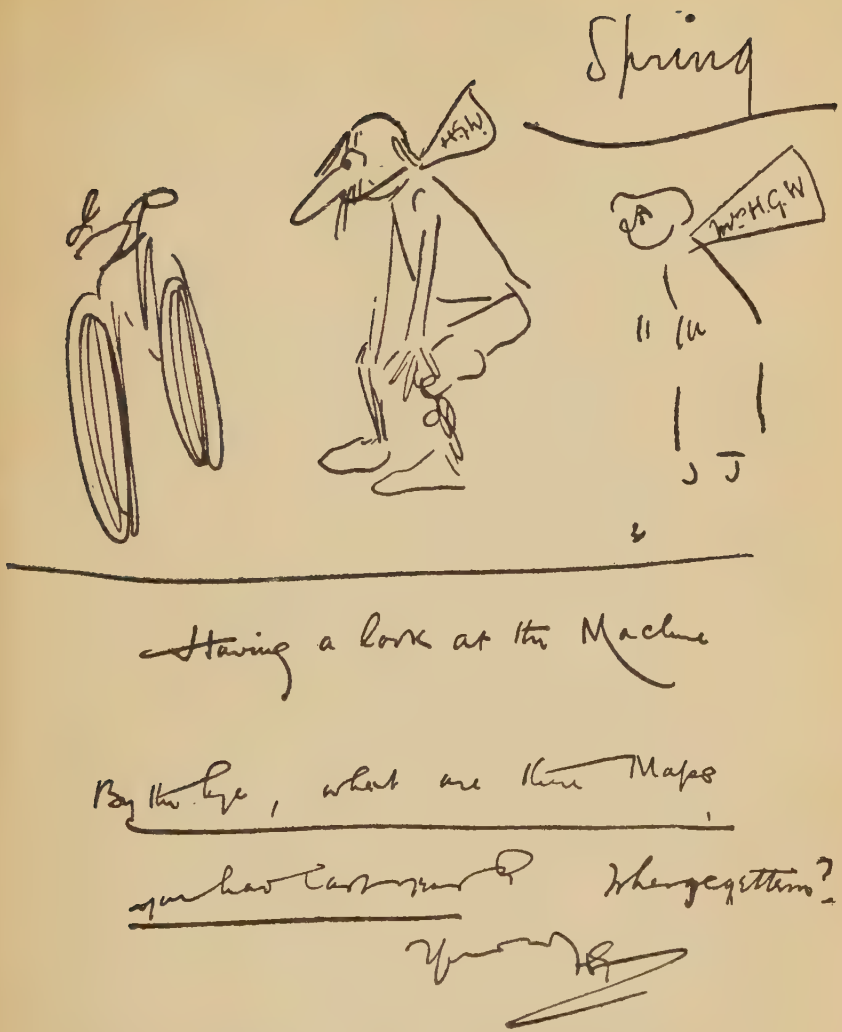
Wells may have had such moods, but that they prevailed I do not for a moment believe. He was having a good time and he knew it. His new acquaintances were the best of men, and he rejoiced in their company. Henley lived close at hand, loud-voiced, shaggy-bearded, "red-faced and jolly like an October sunset," tirelessly talking and laughing in his garden and laying down the law with emphatic fist to

[1] *Excelsior.*

his little court. Pett Ridge was an early intimate, and young Edwin Pugh, and there were "the Gazetteers"—Hind, Marriott-Watson, Harry Cust, G. W. Stevens, and the rest—nor were Simmons, Davies, and other older friends forgotten.

Ill-health and the necessity of living outside London made his emergence from seclusion into literary society a somewhat slow process, but as he joined one or two clubs, and attended New Vagabond and Omar Khayyam dinners, his circle of acquaintances widened, and he and Mrs. Wells, shy and youthful both of them, began to appear at literary gatherings. Then, following their move from Woking to Worcester Park, towards the end of 1896, they themselves began to entertain. Heatherlea, the new home, was a large, pleasant house with airy rooms and shady lawns behind it. For the first time Wells had a room all to himself, a study on the top floor, lined with books and pictures, and offering from the windows a view of distant Surrey pinewoods.

He made at this time one of many efforts to establish a working routine. The morning was to be given to unimaginative work, correcting proofs of typescript, or writing letters. After lunch, exercise for health's sake—walking or cycling. The middle 'nineties were the days of the great cycling boom; Wells had been an enthusiast since 1890, when the modern "safety" model became popular, and besides single machines he and his wife had a tandem which was frequently called into service. Following tea at half-past-three the day's real work would begin, and from then until dinner at eight, and afterwards till midnight if he was in the vein, he would write steadily at new stories and articles; on this period his output was to depend. But such plans never lasted long. He confessed to an interviewer in 1906 that he had tried to devise many time-tables but had found that he could do more "in an hour in that condition of spontaneous impulse than in a whole week of regular effort." In fact, he worked quite irregularly; a few good days would be followed by as many of stupidity and indolence. "Almost all



"Having a look at the Machine" (1897)
(FROM A LETTER TO PROF. A. M. DAVIES)

his early works were fairly spontaneous. His magazine essays, which were subsequently published under the titles of *Certain Personal Matters* and *Select Conversations with an Uncle,* were written in that way. It was his custom then to get up in the morning and talk with Mrs. Wells about any ideas that he had in his head, and after breakfast he would sit down to work them out. If the inspiration did not come then he pushed the matter aside because it was sure to come later. In this way he used to do about three articles a week, and is still satisfied with most of them. *The Stolen Bacillus* and most of his earlier short stories were written in this manner." Some of the romances—he cited *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*—were written "in intermittent periods of spontaneousness. They were often dropped in the midst of other work, then toiled at, taken to pieces and put together in all sorts of ways." Once and once only—with *Love and Mr. Lewisham*—he worked to a carefully planned scheme, and ever afterwards, he said, the Laocoön reminded him of nothing so much as a novelist struggling with a scenario! He was convinced, he added, that he would have done better to have trusted to spontaneous inspiration.[1] All his work from first to last, it may be noted, has been done in his own handwriting, never by dictation, and has been rewritten again and again, with much excision. *The Invisible Man,* as published, for example, was scarcely half the length of its first version. In early days he was wont to regard the need for such effort as evidence of his lack of literary ability.

But whatever work might be in hand, Saturday afternoons were given up to friends, to tea and talk and—first and mildest of a variety of games—croquet. Pett Ridge of course was often there, and Pugh and Marriott-Watson and Hind and Stevens and Clarence Rook, sometimes Dorothy Richardson (who had been at school with Mrs. Wells) and Henley and Frank Harris, or, among the newer acquaintances, Grant Allen, Zangwill, Gissing, Morley

[1] *New York Herald,* April 15, 1906.

Roberts, Jerome, Douglas Sladen, Jacobs, George Whale, Edward Clodd, Sidney Lee, Clement Shorter, and Dollie and Ernest Radford. There could be in such company no lack of lively conversation, and Wells, now growing plump and exchanging that first bird-like keenness of his features for a healthier joviality, was even so early the centre of attraction. Congenitally untidy he might be, hair rumpled, dressed always in loose flapping tweeds, but the eyes were alert and clear, and the high husky voice crackled with laughter as, busily gesticulative, he launched his eager, breathless, comprehensive monologues.

Some friends he got to know by reviewing their books. From Woking he wrote to J. V. Milne: "I'm not denying Grant Allen has a plentiful lack of humour and no artistic feeling worth speaking of. I said as much in the *Saturday Review* and his pretty way of taking it was the beginning of my friendliness towards him." His acquaintance with Joseph Conrad originated from an appreciative, though critical, notice of *The Outcast of the Islands* printed in the same paper.

About this time, also, his old Bromley school chum reappeared and became a frequent guest at Heatherlea. Now he too was an author—and actor—of sorts; he wrote terrible melodramas and yet more devastating comedies, which like those of Chitterlow (who reflects aspects of his character) consisted largely of soliloquy and "business." Wells has described this friend, and in particular his "one intolerable magnificent habit"—he called it "blowing"—which finally severed their friendship, in a passage which I think deserves to be rescued from the obscurity of a privately issued Fabian pamphlet: "I still recall those wonderful experiences very vividly. My friend when about to 'blow' would first assume some easy negligent attitude, as, for example, leaning with one elbow upon a bar, and smiling in a disarming manner he would begin to talk about himself. At first he would tell you quite little things; he would mention quite casually his unexpected physical

strength; he would enlarge upon his personal charm; he would give instances to show when it had been irresistible; he would quote cases tending to show that it was always irresistible. He would pass from this to his singularly correct intuitions, to his dramatic gift, to his intellectual power. He would tell remarkable things. He would tell more and more remarkable things. He would tell you wonderful things. He would tell you marvels. He would tell you marvels upon marvels. He expanded—visibly. He made your head reel; he towered over you. You would discover that this simple-looking, rather carelessly dressed individual was greater than Irving—greater than Garrick—greater than anyone. He made you feel that it was an extraordinary privilege to talk to him. He would explain how he swayed the dramatic world—tell of his hints to Irving, his tips to Tree, his powers of promotion, his gift of organisation, how it was he that first saw that the Lyceum was over and turned it into a music hall, and so on, and so on. He infected one; in his company one tasted a splendour not of this world. And after all he was just a poor indifferent actor, no doubt earning his intermittent thirty shillings a week quite honestly."[1]

Gissing, like George Whale, Wells met at an Omar dinner on November 20th, 1896. A few days later he wrote asking Gissing to visit him at Worcester Park, and the friendship prospered. Through Gissing Wells came to know Dr. Henry Hick, Gissing's comrade since boyhood, who soon became medical adviser to Wells as man and novelist. He was appealed to, for example, in the matter of Bindon's death in *A Story of the Days to Come*. "N.B.," noted Wells, "diseases in magazine stories must be decent." Later he asked: "May I give the gentleman angina pectoris with the other things? On the other hand I've thought of simply giving him beans without explanation. Like God a novelist must supply phenomena—not explain 'em." (To a correspondent who queried his disposition of the population of England in *When the Sleeper Wakes,* he replied: "I am quite un-

[1] *Reconstruction of the Fabian Society.*

able to say *why*. The facts are so—that is all."[1]) Another friend of those days with whom he had a professional as well as personal contact was J. B. Pinker, the well-known literary agent. Wells early recognised the importance of the financial side of authorship, but though no one can doubt his able handling of such matters, he seems never to have been reconciled to their necessity; and eleven years later he referred resentfully in an interview to "this irritating, poisonous flow of business activity" inevitably existing beneath the author's proper intellectual life.[2]

He might well have instanced Gissing as one who, however competent and intelligent in "the things of the study," was completely at a loss in the market-place. He conceived for Gissing a deep and lasting affection which nevertheless did not blind him to his friend's faults of which he has written frankly. In 1897 Gissing, recovering from one of his recurrent illnesses, was staying with his sister at Budleigh Salterton, when Mr. and Mrs. Wells joined them for a brief spring holiday, all four rambling together through the deep Devonshire lanes and along the red coast cliffs, and talking of the Italy Gissing loved so well. Later they met again in London, and Gissing was persuaded, despite his hatred of any form of physical exercise, to become a cyclist, to the great astonishment of his friends. Evidently he shared their surprise, for Wells heard him murmur, as they sped along side by side: "Marvellous proceedings! Riding on ironmongery! Was the like ever seen?" Wells informed Hick: "Gissing writes to say he can ride without his hands, that a fly in his eye rather pleases him than not, that his difficulty in breathing has disappeared. Gissing's on his bicycle—all's right with the world."

[1] Letter to Caldwell Harpur.

[2] Before Pinker he had done some business with *"the* literary agent" of the day. But he wrote to Milne: "We younger men scarcely find him to suit us. He has all his big people, and where he can plant a Conan Doyle on Weyman at twenty guineas a thousand or so, one scarcely expects him to urge the transcendant merits of H.G.W. at seven."

§ 2

THERE was, all that summer of 1897, talk of a visit to Hick's home at New Romney. But Wells was working tremendously hard. No sooner were *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man* completed than he took up *When the Sleeper Wakes*; *Mr. Lewisham* was still actively in hand, and a number of short stories, including *The Crystal Egg*, that superb imaginative effort *The Star*, and the longer *Story of the Stone Age*, were written during this year. "Just now I'm half way to brain fever with a damned story, but very likely in September we shall take a snatch of holiday," he scribbled in a note to Hick from Worcester Park. It was at best but a snatch, and all that winter the dreary grind went on, Wells straining himself to the uttermost, and neglecting the familiar danger-signals. At last, towards the end of February 1898, just as soon as the *Sleeper* approached a marketable state, he and Mrs. Wells were planning to join Gissing in Rome. The last words of the book were written on the evening of March 6th and on March 7th they set out for Italy. Pugh and "Chitterlow" saw them off from Charing Cross Station. It was the first time they had been abroad, and Wells, according to Pugh, was dancing with excitement; he kept shaking hands with his friends and talking, talking, talking. They travelled straight through to Rome, "in those days still mellow and beautiful," to spend four happy weeks with Gissing, visiting the famous sights, tramping in the Campagna, among the Alban Hills, and along the Via Clodia, and talking gaily and untiringly of life and books and of the great Roman romance Gissing so long planned to write and never lived to complete. It was to amuse Gissing, one sunlit morning on the Pincio, that Wells invented the story of *Miss Winchelsea's Heart*—so Gissing-like in conception, so utterly Wellsian in narration. Early in April Wells and Mrs. Wells were off once more, to Naples and Capri. A few days later

their friends were startled to read in a London newspaper that he was dangerously ill with hæmorrhage. It was a false report, but, Gissing commented to Hick, never was there a more circumstantial lie.

It was in fact an anticipation. By the end of May Wells was in London again and hard at work on *Mr. Lewisham,* but in consequence of sour wines drunk abroad, and a bad Channel crossing on the way home, he put himself temporarily in the hands of a local doctor. Once more the Pandora of overwork was opening the "box of unpleasant surprises" he had carried about in his side since the accident at Holt. Early in August he was better and promising a visit to New Romney in the near future; he sent Hick a "bulletin" of his recent movements. This disclosed that he and Mrs. Wells had actually made a start by cycle on July 29th, returned to London, set out again, and again returned from Seaford. "For some days there was absolute tranquillity, succeeded on Thursday, July 28th, by packing and general inflammation. A trunk, a lady's hatbox and other matter was exuded, and on July 29th the expedition violently discharged itself to Seaford again. *Why* Seaford? Why not direct to Romney? Because it would seem we are not dealing with a simple case of expedition here, but with expedition complicated by unfinished novels or at least an unfinished novel. The Roentgen ray apparatus has revealed a dark disorderly mass in the trunk (crushing one of the lady's blouses) which is very probably the irritant body in question. It is proposed that the patient shall remain in absolute seclusion at Seaford for the next three weeks undergoing daily operations for the removal of this complication. That disposed of, the expedition to Romney will be a comparatively simple matter."

But there were other irritant bodies also at work, and the three weeks was shortened to a few days. Suddenly he collapsed completely, with rigour and an abscess on the kidney. He telegraphed to Hick: "Can you take me in: am ill"; and forthwith arrived on August 9th, to spend two

months in the doctor's care. Work had to be set absolutely aside, and it was during this enforced inactivity that he produced for the amusement of the doctor's little daughter Marjorie an illustrated story, *The Adventures of Tommy,* to the publication of which he consented only in 1929 when he gave the copyright to Hick to help him establish a younger daughter—Wells's godchild—in medical practice.

The worst was soon over. "The patient progresses rapidly," he wrote to Pett Ridge. "We are all assiduous (whatever that means). For my own part I am with him night and day, heeding little but his comfort." But it was clear that there was a good deal of invalidism ahead, and that he must, "for some obscure geological reason," get right away from London. He told J. V. Milne: "Valetudinarianism is my game for the next year or so and the confounded world must manage itself, until I am better at least. A man who would advise others must first diagnose himself and my abdomen is mystery enough for me, a strange region of which I am, I find, merely suzerain. That shrewd blow on the kidney which has caused all this pother I had before ever I knew you. It's well the confounded viscus waited until I was prosperous enough to get advice and consultations and nursing and so on, or I should certainly by now have been getting myself unpopular in another world by frank criticism of the detailed management of heaven. But the gust has passed and I still float in a shattered condition. The house I have to get must be on sand or gravel and high and sheltered.... Sandgate and Hythe and Rye present a certain suitableness of soil and aspect, but the houses! There's no word for it, as the costermonger said. Servant-murdering basements, sanitary insanities, and not a decent bathroom anywhere. I want a house with five sane rooms and the proper fitting of kitchen, bathroom and so forth—I am ready to go to £80 and I can't get it. I'm tied to this house still—I was in bed to within a few days ago, but my wife returns from desperate raids, nigh upon tears."

The house-hunting continued until Wells feared to

make himself ill again with the worry and effort. At last, like Kipps, whose adventures in quest of a home clearly derive from these experiences, he decided to build. Meanwhile, he rented furnished houses, first Beach Cottage, Granville Road, Sandgate ("back door slap upon the sea; the shrimps will come in and whack about on the dining-room oil-cloth"[1]) for the winter of 1898 and 1899, and then the neighbouring Arnold House, a semi-detached villa facing the sea, on the lower road of the town.

§ 3

Thus he came into the James-Conrad-Hueffer circle of intensely art-conscious writers then living in and about Rye and Winchelsea. He had been in correspondence with Conrad since May 1896, but though on hearing of Wells's illness Conrad roundly asserted that for the last two years, "I have lived on terms of close intimacy with you, referring to you many a page of my work, scrutinizing many sentences by the light of your criticism,"[2] and so forth, it was a purely literary and postal intimacy, and they only now became friends and neighbours in the flesh. Henry James first met Wells at New Romney, paying him several visits (once with Edmund Gosse) while he was lying ill in Hick's house.

But friendly as Wells was with both leaders and lieutenants of this Roman endeavour to establish the English Novel as a settled province of the empire of deliberate art, he had no sympathy with their aims and was bored by their talk of technical detail, of Construction, Development, Selection, Vocabulary, Impressionism, and interminably, oh indefatigably, of Style. He saw no room in English literature for what he called "a petty word-mongering"; in this matter he was, he told Arnold Bennett in 1904, "at

[1] Letter to Elizabeth Healey.
[2] *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters.*

one with all the English swells. I am honestly doing what I can to clear my prose of repetition and so on, but except among passages of high value I don't see the force of writing for beauty of phrase." (A style of general design, or of thought, he admitted: *"C'est moi!"*) The godly strove tirelessly to convert him, but his participation in these portentously grave deliberations was wholly defensive; he evaded their arguments by declaring himself, as many times since, no artist but a journalist. Yet his work forced them, even as he blasphemed, to award him an unqualified admiration, and they gave it generously. It may be that he remained so persistently immune from their gospels because he was, just then, somewhat in reaction against them. *Love and Mr. Lewisham* was nearing completion. It was the most consciously "written" of any of his books. It had been conceived as a work of art, planned most carefully, and read aloud to secure the utmost grace and simplicity. He told Miss Healey: "There is really more work in that book than there is in many a first class F.R.S. research, and stagnant days and desert journeys beyond describing." Yet when he finished it at last at Beach Cottage, having in his own phrase saved no more than one straight plank from the vast scaffold originally designed, he was not pleased; and the book on publication was a success neither of esteem nor in the bookshops. Nevertheless it is noteworthy that *The First Men in the Moon* and some of the short stories of his early Sandgate period were written with equal care, and that the contemporaneous *Sea Lady* is certainly one of the most dramatically effective and clear-cut of all his books.

In 1898 *Who's Who* noted Wells's recreation to be cycling; this was changed in 1899 to "detailed description of his various illnesses, and architecture." [1] But he was growing speedily stronger despite minor relapses; a year after his collapse he could tell Arnold Bennett—a constant corre-

[1] From Beach Cottage he wrote to Pett Ridge: *"You*—ill! Just consider the absurdity, the impropriety of this! A want of consideration for those whose privilege it is to suffer and be strong. A pretty bit of amatoor illness it is, I warrant! Why, even your letter! When one is being ill one

spondent since 1897—that the only remaining consequences were a few minor restrictions upon his diet and exercise. Henceforward he got steadily better. Meanwhile life went on pleasantly enough. He was writing at such various books as *The First Men in the Moon, Anticipations,* and *The Sea Lady.* (Soon after the publication of the last Wells was travelling in Italy, and stayed at the same hotel as Mrs. Humphry Ward. She commanded his presence. He went, expecting no less than a censure for his book's satiric references to her heroine Marcella. But she, dear lady, wished only to intimate encouragingly that she had heard of a book he had written about a Time Machine.) There were friends at hand or frequently visiting; among the latter Pett Ridge, Pinker, presently Arnold Bennett, and York Powell of the hearty voice and laugh; among the former R. A. M. Stevenson and Stephen Crane, both the best of companions and both slowly dying. Wells was one of the many guests at that famous Christmas party of 1899, when Crane, striving feverishly to stave off homesickness and despair, filled Brede Place with his friends and ran riot for three days and nights, the principal incident being the performance of a play, written and acted by Wells, Crane, A. E. W. Mason, and as many others as cared to take part.

The building of Spade House, occupied in December, was certainly the chief adventure of 1900. Wells visited the scene of operations daily, took his visitors to see it, watched the brick walls steadily rising from the first foundations. He was somewhat horrified to realise that building methods had scarcely advanced since "the days of the Pyramids" and his busy brain had visions of a mechanism "running to and fro along a temporary rail, that will squeeze out wall as one squeezes paint from a tube."[1] It was no doubt his intense interest which gave rise to the legend that he himself

always writes in a hand like earthquakes. The fact is you better stick to literature. You're beginning too late in life to make anything of ill-health. I'm not jealous at your coming into my line—not a bit of it—only I tell you as a candid friend it won't do."

[1] *Anticipations.*

had built the place with his own hands. Another equally fabulous story attaches to the name of the house, planned by the well-known architect, C. F. A. Voysey, who had a fancy for decorating his buildings at convenient points with heart-shaped ornaments. Why hearts? asked Wells, and for variety's sake demanded spades. But romantic Americans took away the tale that Wells had won a fortune at Monte Carlo by betting in some unspecified way on the ace of spades....

It proved a pleasant house, standing on the upper road between Folkestone and Sandgate, with its back to the sea. Built with a long sloping red roof, rough-cast walls, and neat latticed windows, it was designed within and without as simply as possible. The low-ceilinged rooms were few in number but all comfortably large, and there was a roomy hall and staircase. But its glory was the garden—Mrs. Wells's especial care—and the view. The garden at its end fell sharply to the beach ninety feet below; it had tennis and smaller sunken lawns, a pergola, summerhouses, and a rock garden, and from it one looked to the west down across the blue bay to the smooth sweep of coast stretching by Dymchurch Wall and Romney Sands to Dungeness, and upon the sloping houses of Sandgate, right up the long High Street set aglow each evening by the setting sun. One might even make out the coast of France; and at night the steamers passing up and down the narrow strait became mere gleaming points of stealthy glowworms, and the English coast-lights flashed to east and west, while out across the dark murmuring waves the great beams of Gris-Nez shone and wheeled from dusk to dawn.

This was the centre of Wells's life for nearly a decade. Here he was to write *Mankind in the Making, The Food of the Gods, A Modern Utopia, Kipps, In the Days of the Comet, New Worlds for Old, The War in the Air, First and Last Things, Tono-Bungay, Ann Veronica,* and *The History of Mr. Polly*—a list which includes most of his very best work. He entered Spade House a writer of note; he

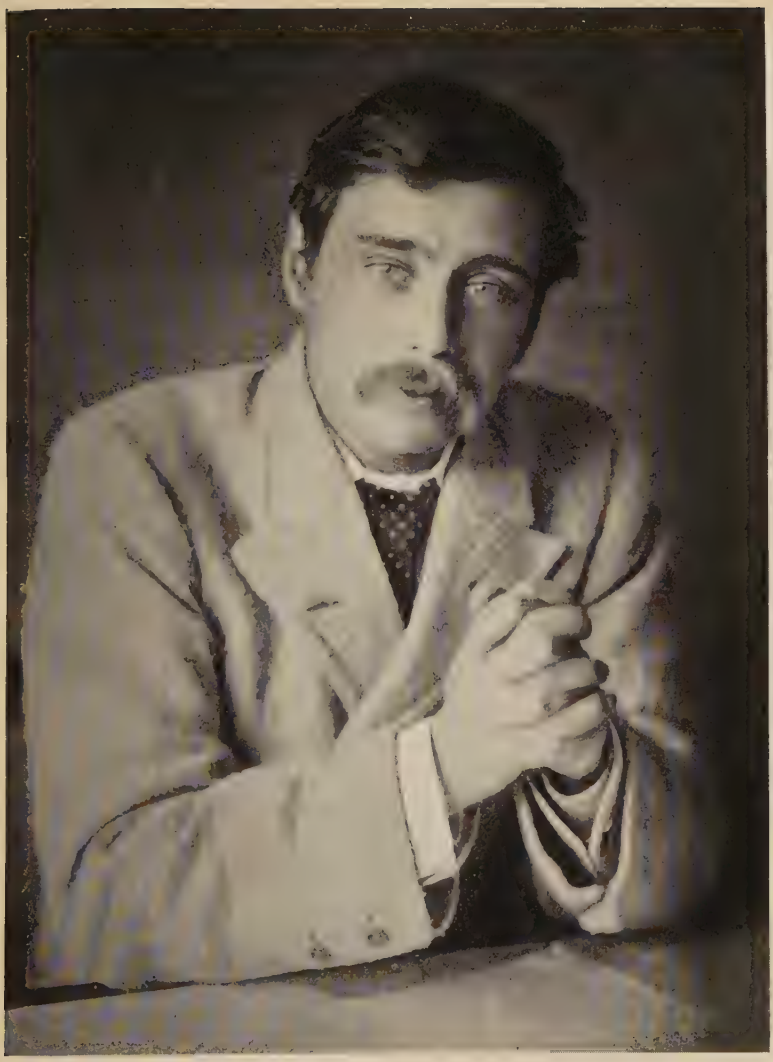


PHOTO ELLIOTT & FRY

THE RISING AUTHOR (1901)

left it one who had set his name indelibly in the records of English literature. In that decade he went as near to practical politics as he was ever to go (for his post-war connection with the Labour Party was little more than a gesture), and retreated again. In that decade, too, he fought out the essential battle if not of his life then at least of his art.

He was, in these earlier years, intent upon a complete recovery and establishment of health. In the warmer weather bathing was his chief delight, but he took to tennis and badminton with the energy he bestows upon whatever occupation is to hand; a furious wind blew almost continuously across the court, and it delighted him to lure expert players into a game, and beat them easily while they struggled against the unaccustomed handicap with a growing exasperation. Walking and cycling were other favourite forms of exercise, and often he would take his work and wander for days about the Kentish countryside on foot or wheel, sleeping at inns and farms. So he achieved a suntanned, square-shouldered fitness, becoming the genial energetic personality—melancholy only in his photographs—who was an inexhaustible source of ideas, of exposition, of wit and laughter, and only incidentally, it seemed, the most vivid and forceful writer of his day.

He had by now learned his lesson and abandoned all efforts at routine. Sometimes he would work all day long, and for days in succession; again for days he would rest and play. At one time he tried getting up at four in the morning to write; at another he sought inspiration in Beethoven piano duets played hour after hour by Mrs. Wells and a visitor. For the most part inspiration came as it would —and it came almost continuously.

It is, in any consideration of Wells's personal and literary life from the middle 'nineties onwards, impossible to overestimate the part played by his late wife. She gave him, he has said, stability; and that meant, in the sphere of living, an ever-widening range of interests and movement, and in the sphere of writing a progressively effective productivity.

It meant continuity. Wells sees himself as in the earlier 'nineties hard and crude, but in fact both qualities have endured in him—they have at best been schooled; always there has been a tendency to run amok. One sees him as mainly a happy man, but he contains, one suspects, the potentialities not so much of profound despair as of profound disgust. Like all great humorous writers, but more so than most because of his wider imaginative range, his soul has a side scarcely less concealed and strange than the farther side of the moon. He has moods when all things turn bitter to his taste, when, as the late C. F. G. Masterman testified, an intimate friend "approaching a man normally companionable, hospitable and brilliant in conversation, may suddenly find a whip struck across his face, and a series of insults and stinging sarcasms thrown at his attempts at conversation." [1] Partly this may be the result of his tendency to overwork, with its penalties of subsequent depression, but it goes deeper than that. Mrs. Wells for over thirty years played a tremendous part in mitigating its consequences, both by being what in herself she so exquisitely was, and in more mundane ways: "She stuck to me so sturdily that in the end I stuck to myself. I do not know what I should have been without her. She stabilised my life. She gave it a home and dignity. She preserved its continuity. Not without incessant watchfulness and toil. I have a hundred memories of an indefatigable typist carrying on her work in spite of a back-ache; of a grave judicial proof-reader in a garden shelter, determined that no slovenliness should escape her; of a resolute little person, clear-headed but untrained in business method, battling steadfastly with the perplexities of our accumulating accounts and keeping her grips on them." [2] Clearly Wells would under any circumstances have written, and written magnificently, but without her steadying influence it is at least arguable that he might have become a rebel of the type, if not the degree, of, say, D. H. Lawrence. Certainly, one feels,

[1] *Review of Reviews*, June 1922.
[2] Introduction, *Book of Catherine Wells*.

he would not have produced so consecutive and imposing a body of work.

§ 4

He was, in these early Sandgate days, definitely settling down. "Uneventful events constitute my days," he wrote to Miss Healey. "I have got to the middle period of life, I think, the beginning of the middle at any rate; 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer, on the 'ard 'igh road, the first excitement of the start into literature is over and I am working—I hope with an increasing strength and quality—at certain projected things. We never see a press cutting, insult interviewers, avoid literary dinners, pursuing our exalted way towards a goal of our own." He had achieved security, his health and his wife's were immeasurably improved since their marriage, and they felt, early in the century, confidently able "to launch a family." George Phillip Wells was born in July 1901,[1] and Frank Richard in November 1903. "Wells is a happy man—how he flourishes," noted Gissing half-enviously to Hick in 1900, and the figure of N——, prosperous, healthy, and happy in home and work, in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft,* is generally acknowledged as a portrait of Wells: "Every time I see him he looks in better health, for of late years he has taken much more exercise, and he is often travelling. He is happy with his wife and children; the thought of all the comforts and pleasures he is able to give them must be a constant joy to him; were he to die, his family is safe from want. He has friends and acquaintances as many as he desires; congenial folk gather at his table; he is welcome in pleasant houses near and far; his praise is upon the lips of all whose praise is worth having. With all this, he has the good sense to avoid manifest dangers; he has not abandoned his privacy, and he seems

[1] "No pathos whatever this time. The Son is enormous, the Mother facetious, and everything quite radiantly nice." Letter to Pett Ridge. Dr. Hick notes the birth in *Marriage* as drawn from this event.

to be in no danger of being spoilt by good fortune. His work is more to him than a means of earning money; he talks about a book he has in hand almost as freshly and keenly as in the old days, when his annual income was barely a couple of hundred."

Poor Gissing! how completely does his account seem to list all that he himself had not and was not, and one likes to think of the happy weeks he spent with his more fortunate colleague at Sandgate during the summer of 1901. Yet a strange fatality of sorrow and loneliness hung over him even to his deathbed. It was on the Christmas Eve of 1903, as Wells walked in the garden of Spade House before lunch, harassed by pressure of urgent and important work, that a telegram came to say that Gissing was seriously ill in the South of France and needed help. Wells telegraphed to Morley Roberts, asking whether he could possibly make the journey; Roberts replied that he, too, was ill. At once Wells set off, caught a boat at Folkestone, ate his Christmas dinner in Bayonne, and so came with all possible speed to St. Jean de Luz in the shadow of the blue Pyrenees. He found Gissing delirious in a small, dark, stuffy room, tended only by an incompetent *religieuse,* for his French wife was far too completely overwhelmed by her distress to be of much use. Again he telegraphed to Roberts, begging him to come as he could not stay, and meanwhile he took the place of the *religieuse,* and did what he could for his friend's well-being. (The death of Edward Ponderevo in *Tono-Bungay* is a clear reminiscence of Wells's last unhappy hours with Gissing.) On December 27th, having heard that Roberts was already on his way south from Paris, he left for home, not realising how critical Gissing's condition was and believing that Roberts would arrive within an hour or two. But Roberts was delayed, and in the early hours of December 28th, between Wells's departure and Roberts's arrival, Gissing died.

Some eighteen months later Mrs. Joseph Wells died, and a friend asked whether this made no difference to Wells's views on life after death. He replied: "I don't believe a bit

more in human immortality because my mother is dead. That event and its circumstances have set up all sorts of trains of thought, but I've never let my affections rule my beliefs." [1]

Such unhappy incidents apart, life went smoothly. There was the Fabian incursion, passage, and exit. There were trips abroad, to France, and Switzerland, and Germany, tramps in Italy, vacations in the mountains, happy days in Venice, Capri, Locarno, Paris. There was a journalistic trip to the eastern American States in the spring of 1906, when he spent two months visiting New York, Boston, Chicago, Washington, and some of the universities and lesser towns; he tried, without success, to avoid Niagara. He met President Roosevelt; he also refused to be hurried past that no less significant figure, Booker T. Washington. He was in New York when Maxim Gorki, coming on an errand of mercy, was hunted into hiding by an outburst of that hysterical self-righteousness which indifferently burns a harmless man because he has a black face, or obstinately murders a Sacco and a Vanzetti in the face of all justice and mercy. One other encounter may be mentioned. Before he set out he was asked by a friend to look up a certain Upton Sinclair, a young writer of genius who was starving in New York. Dutifully he promised, but arrived to find *The Jungle* the sensation of the year, and Sinclair not merely a wealthy man but the centre of the world's attention.

There were in these years side-glances at the theatre—talk of dramatisations of *The Sea Lady* and other books, plans for a collaboration with Arnold Bennett to produce "The Dramatic Sensation of 1903" and so forth. Actually his first play was an adaptation of *Kipps* written in 1910 and 1911 with Rudolf Besier; it was produced in 1912 after some difficulties ("Howard de Walden wants James Welch to play Kipps and Jerome to touch it up a bit and make it human; I prefer Little Tich" [2]) and ran for a few weeks with O. B.

[1] Letter to Caldwell Harpur.
[2] Letter to P. Macer Wright.

night & amused myself enormously

most of the time. His effect is of

being studded with good things. Someone

(Wm Archer I think) says it was damaged

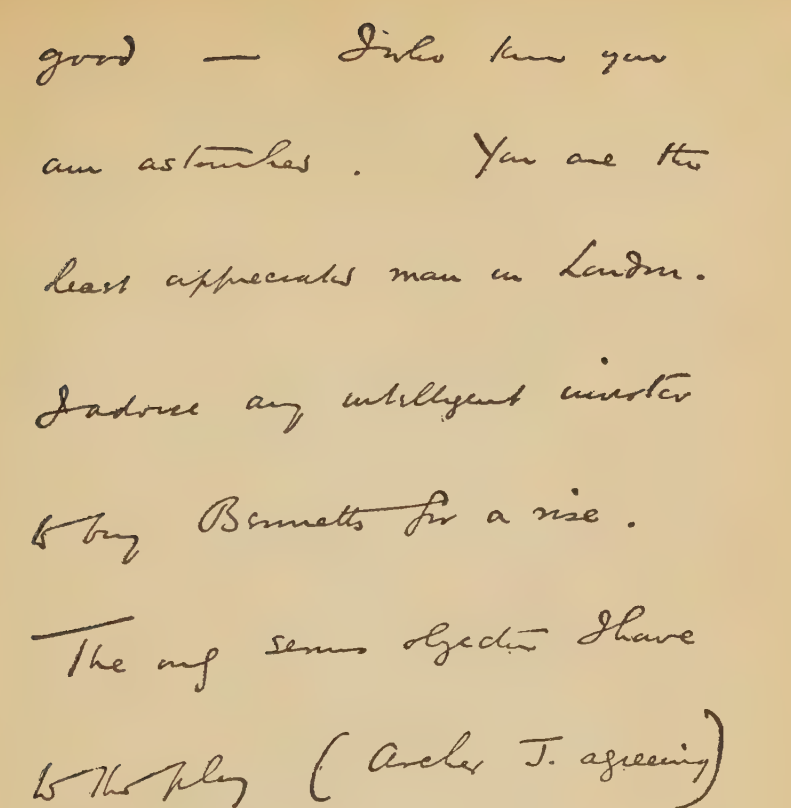
by Huneker but I don't think so

nor does Jane. — which helps

seeing she saw the Sunday night

performance. He's a "real creation"

But your lines are so damned



"Your lines are so damned good"

(TWO PAGES FROM A LETTER TO MR. ARNOLD BENNETT, 1909)

Clarence in the part of "Our Mr. Kipps." Its only successor has been the no more satisfactory modernised version of *The Wonderful Visit* by Wells and St. John Ervine, played for a month or so in London in 1921. But mostly he followed the normal routine of the man of letters whose life is centred in his study, and took rather less than the average interest in public literary manifestations. In particular he avoided literary societies of whatever type and purpose. A literary academy in England, he declared in 1903, would be only "the last refinement of vulgarity," and again in 1912, rejecting the proposal of Henry James to make him a member of the lately formed Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature, he expressed his indifference to all Academies and Associations, all Bodies and Boards. He and his work, he said, were essentially anarchic.

He did not, however, reject society in the wider sense—or even society in the narrower. His adventures in the latter, and his growing prosperity, led to attacks by socialists of narrower sympathies. He admitted their charges of living and travelling in comfort, and declared his intention to go on because "so I can think and work without stress. All the thinking for socialism has been done by men of some independence and leisure. I insure my life heavily and invest what I can so as not to be worried and tempted for the sake of my wife and children. I mix with all sorts of people—peers and plutocrats, and playwrights and bathchairmen, and dressmakers and workgirls, and clerks and shop-assistants, and so on; and they are all worth knowing. I want to go about freely with, and taste the way of living of, all sorts of people. I want everybody to have at least as much ease, leisure, and freedom as I have myself, and that is why I am a socialist. With a sensibly reorganised social and economic system, I believe that it is quite practicable and so I am doing my best to bring that about." Incidentally, he reckoned socialism to be his chief luxury. In the past four years it had cost him in time, energy, and damaged sales for his books, at least £2,000, "and that is merely the begin-

ning of the damage it will do to the solid worldly success I have within my grasp." Still, he was going on with it. "If other militant socialists don't like my frank and independent help on these terms, I'm sorry; they will have it just the same." [1] Some years later he replied to a correspondent who asked whether she would be justified, as a socialist, in accepting an inheritance: "There is nothing in any socialist theory known to me that justifies your abandonment of this income or releases you from the obligation of using it in the development of your public efficiency. Dumping it on poor relations and then going on hum-drum earning your keep is—but see the New Testament for the Buried Talent."

At first he visited London infrequently, but as he grew stronger, and friendships and interests widened, he was often to be seen at his clubs, at the theatres, at dinners and other functions. And all the while Spade House continued to "open affectionate arms and turn down a bed" to innumerable guests, to the older friends and to the new: the Shaws, the Webbs, the Blands, G. K. Chesterton, H. W. Nevinson, E. S. P. Haynes, Anthony Hope and countless others. Recollections of the happy times they had, the games, the untiring spontaneous invention of the charades, appear in the introduction to *The Book of Catherine Wells,* or again are reflected in passages of *Joan and Peter.* One brief glimpse of Wells's contribution to the charades, which I believe has not been mentioned in print, reveals him as adorned with a long tow beard and enhaloed by a dinner-table mat, and circling slowly in strange gyrations across the room in illustration of a familiar quotation, presently explained as: "God moves in a mysterious way. . . ." This blasphemy so shocked one neighbour that his children were forbidden to visit the house thereafter. Another amusement which became for a while a passion with a select few was the miniature war game originated by Jerome K. Jerome, elaborated by Wells with suggestions from Masterman and others, and described in detail in *Little Wars.* Photography too was a hobby of the

[1] *Ought Socialists to Live Poor?*

earlier Sandgate days, and the results were not always happy. "What will you give us if we don't send your photograph?" Wells asked Arnold Bennett. "We haven't printed it yet, but the negative looks good for a fiver to me."

He has always been a very candid critic of his friends' work—though keenly appreciative too, especially where younger writers are concerned—and a letter to Bennett written in 1905 upon the publication of *Sacred and Profane Love* is typical in both vigour and penetration: "It *is* good and it *is* bad and it is most interesting and readable. Ouida and the best French models and our Bennett and a certain extraordinary and persistent cleverness take one in gusts. Your English though is much less clear and simple than it was—stresses in the epithets, and a surface of hard bright points. And I feel more than ever the difference between our minds. You are always taking surface values that I reject; hotels are not luxurious, *trains de luxe* are full of coal-grit, *chefs* and pianists are not marvellous persons, dramatic triumphs are silly uproars. But it isn't irony—you believe in these things. There never was a woman like your woman, but no end of women journalists and minor actresses have imagined themselves like her. For some unfathomable reason you don't penetrate. You are like George Moore. You have probably never been in love. I doubt if you ever weep. You have no passion for Justice. You prefer 'style' to beauty. You are not a poet, you are not a genius. But you are a dear delightful person." Three years later, however, his tribute was unqualified: *"The Old Wives' Tale.* Ripping. Enormous various Balzac. Arnold has surpassed himself. A great book and a big book.... I think the work a quite pre-eminent novel so that it at least doubles your size in my estimation. It is far too big, too fine and too restrained to get at first anything like the recognition it is bound in the long run to bring you.... I am certain it will secure you the respect of all the distinguished critics who are now consuming gripe-water and suchlike, if you never write another line. It is all at such a high level that one does not know where to begin

commending, but I think the high light for me is the bake-house glimpse of Samuel Povey. But the knowledge, the detail, the spirit! from first to last it *never* fails." His frankness was not always appreciated, and to the recipient of the letter already quoted on page 113 he wrote subsequently: "I am awfully sorry if the tone of my letter was arrogant and my remarks impertinent. We poor devils of writing men put all our care into our work and our letters are at times apt to be just what they ought not to be and aren't meant to be. The Lord God (which is a different establishment from me in spite of your suggestion) knows I am sure how sincerely I admire your work. Only you know I have a sort of habit of not mentioning that. I don't think the indisputable badness of much of my own work ought to prevent my having and expressing an opinion of that of other men."

That he was in these first years of the new century by no means satisfied with his own literary position is clear from both private letters and printed comments. He admitted his Continental vogue—the majority of his books had by 1903 been translated into a dozen European languages and "his work is popular for serialisation in the English Magazines, but," he complained in an autobiographical article in 1903, "in the circulating library and in the hearts and homes of England and America, his position is one of extreme insignificance." [1] The great American public, he told Arnold Bennett in 1902, had mostly never heard of him. "Paragraphs circulate to the effect that I was a 'dry goods clerk' and I class with George Griffiths as a purveyor of wild *'pseudo'* scientific extravaganza. The reviewer of books in America—he appears to get printed in among the dentifrice advertisements—like the very lowest class reviewer in this country says with an airy confidence that I 'outrage every probability of science' and things like that. 'English Jules Verne' is my utmost glory." [2]

[1] *H. G. Wells, Esq., B.Sc.*

[2] One may set beside Wells's repudiation of Verne, Verne's repudiation of Wells, in an interview printed in *T.P.'s Weekly*, October 9th, 1903: "I do not see the possibility of comparison between his work and mine. We

But the acknowledgment he sought could not be long withheld. *Kipps* was a major success in 1905, *The War in the Air* in 1908, and *Tono-Bungay* in 1909. Intermediate books too were read and discussed, and Wells's pronouncements on this and that and the other began to figure more and more in the newspapers, the final British testimony to any man's pre-eminence.

do not proceed in the same manner. It occurs to me that his stories do not repose on very scientific bases. No, there is no *rapport* between his work and mine. I make use of physics. He invents. I go to the moon in a cannon-ball, discharged from a cannon. Here there is no invention. He goes to Mars in an airship, which he constructs of a metal which does away with the law of gravitation. *Ca, c'est très joli,* but show me this metal. Let him produce it."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FABIAN

§ 1

THE FABIAN episode was more than an interlude in the development of a novelist. One's first impression is of a sedate tea-party at which this newcomer takes his place quietly enough. But soon he grows fretful, fidgety, starts up, expostulates, demands fresh tea, must have it *at once,* splashes it eagerly into the cups, and insists that everyone drink it piping hot. And then, being resisted and restrained, throws up his hands and bustles away, leaving the party to its chilly fare, its somnolent ruminations. In fact the Wells who left the Fabian Society was not quite the Wells who had entered it. He had acquired a certain political experience; he had taken the measure of certain individual politicians; he had learned a lesson in his own and other people's practical limitations. During all these years he was seeking a lever *to move men*; and failing in the political field he naturally, in returning to the writing of novels, sought to make the latter the instrument of the purpose he could not effect as a Fabian.

He was brought into the Society by the Webbs. Though a socialist since South Kensington days, he had found the existing socialist organisations so irrelevant to "that progressive development and realisation of a great system of ideas which is socialism," [1] that for many years he did not bother to connect himself with any one of them. Partly this

[1] *Socialism and the Family.*

may have been due to the way in which socialism, like most progressive thinking, went underground towards the end of the 'eighties with the return of a temporary prosperity. It was not dead but sleeping, and even quite vividly dreaming, but for a man engrossed in making his way in another world it was easy to give it very little active attention. The 'nineties were a decade of energetic imperialisms, and even Wells, optimistically, was induced to conceive the Empire as a step towards that World State which from the first ("I was born cosmopolitan") was his unwavering ideal. He compared the British Empire to an open hand extended in fellowship across the world, contrasting it with the threatening fist of the German Empire. In that analogy lay the essence of his faith as imperialist, and if today he is no longer such, it is because imperialism has become merely an expansion and aggravation of nationalism. Kipling—the Junker ideal—has triumphed.

It was at a time when *Anticipations* was prominent in the bookshops that Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb unexpectedly appeared one day "riding very rapidly upon bicycles, from the direction of London, offering certain criticisms of my general forecast and urging me to join and stimulate the Fabians."[1] Wells was just then in a mood to listen. Imperialist he might be, but rebel he remained; in December 1901 he wrote to R. A. Gregory, his old student friend: "We'll have a Republic in twelve years—or at any rate we may have if only everyone will buck up. The amount of latent treason that I am discovering is amazing. I shall talk treason at the R. I. I am going to write, talk and preach revolution for the next five years." The reference is to his address, *The Discovery of the Future,* given at the Royal Institution on January 24th, 1902. This paper has been repeatedly printed since. It is an assertion of the provisional nature of all established institutions, and the "treason" lies in its comprehensive repudiation of all traditionalism and the legal attitude of mind.

[1] *Anticipations,* Introduction 1914 edition.

The Webbs came, talked, and made friends. They found his New Republicanism quite in line with their own conceptions, and they wanted to take him up and have his help. Mrs. Webb in 1902 devised a club, the Coefficients, which met monthly to discuss, over a dinner-table in the last stages of dessert, the problems of the Empire's hopes and possibilities. The Pentagram Circle in *The New Machiavelli* clearly reflects impressions of these gatherings. Wells was one of the original twelve members; by 1908, when he ceased to attend, the membership was twenty-five, and the Club brought together at one time and another imperialists of such contrasting shades of political opinion as L. S. Amery, Edward Grey, R. B. Haldane, Bertrand Russell, Sidney Webb, W. Pember Reeves, Henry Newbolt, J. L. Garvin, Lord Milner, Lord Robert Cecil, Colonel Repington, C. F. G. Masterman and Josiah Wedgwood. Naturally no common conception of the Empire was ever reached—the division was primary between what Wells calls the nationalist-imperialists and the cosmopolitan-imperialists—but the association gave him his first intimate contact with some leading figures of the so-called "governing classes." He had lost all his faith in the constructive intentions of British imperialism by 1905.

§ 2

His entry into the Fabian Society in February 1903, sponsored by Bernard Shaw and Graham Wallas, was at the time no more than an incident. He paid his intellectual footing by reading to members in the following month a paper on *The Question of Scientific Administrative Areas in Relation to Municipal Undertakings*. It was an exposition of the imperative connection between swifter transport and the expansion of the administrative area. (Its basic idea, fundamental to his argument for the World State, is briefly that with the aeroplane and steamship linking all the earth

in a single network of communications, the world itself becomes for certain general purposes the only admissible administrative unit.) It was not a striking lecture; the Fabians, with Shaw as their inimitable standard, never considered Wells a satisfactory speaker. Then, for some thirty months, he did little or nothing in the Society. He came to occasional meetings, made rarer modest appearances upon the platform, paid his subscription, read the *Fabian News* —and went on with his literary work.

But gradually he became convinced of wasted opportunities. Socialism, it must be understood, was always to him much less a political policy than an attitude, a way of looking at things, a "realisation of a common and universal loyalty in mankind, the awakening of a collective consciousness of duty in humanity." [1] Essentially its motive was the scientific motive, setting service above gain, order above disorder, fact above advantage; it was the synthesis of all constructive effort. He saw it as altogether too comprehensive to be made the possession—the exclusive weapon—of one political group. He wanted to keep it a god altogether above any Battle of Westminster, an illuminant upon the entire field to reveal to all combatants alike the folly of their present petty quarrels. Socialist organisations there must be, but they were after all no more than the "rustling hem of the garment of advancing socialism," and their task was not to manœuvre and squabble for some instant victory of the ballot box, but simply and continually to preach the gospel. Wells in these years was coming more and more to realise that to make socialism possible the Collective Mind must first be informed with the socialist spirit. He saw that "there must be a new ideology for new conditions and institutions," and it was his conviction that "an intensive and extensive propaganda of socialism in the broadest sense was a necessary preliminary for effective so-

[1] *First and Last Things.*

cialist politics" which really brings his work as a Fabian into line with his post-war endeavour to create "the organised ideology of a cosmopolitan socialism." Everything, he says, was secondary to that idea in the Fabian disputes. Always he was more New Republican than political socialist.

So he conceived of the Fabian purpose as propagandist, and from that point of view it seemed to him altogether failing in its duty. The Society was then almost at its lowest ebb. Membership was falling, the meetings poorly attended, and the control of policy in the hands of a few dozen members of whom Shaw, Sidney Webb, Hubert Bland, and Sidney Olivier were the all-powerful leaders. In the provinces Fabianism was stagnant. The traditional policy of permeation had become less a policy than a habit. Against this state of affairs Wells revolted. The future, he had already suggested in *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making,* lay with the middle classes, which were, he now declared, on the verge of a great outbreak of interest in the constructive ideals of socialism. Here he clearly anticipated the mood of curiosity which followed the recently founded Labour Party's successes in the General Election of 1906. His critical paper, *Faults of the Fabian,* read to the Society on February 9th, 1906, was planned if not actually written before the Election. It should have been read on January 12th, but was postponed on account of its controversial nature, Wells reading instead the vivid and eloquent *This Misery of Boots,* afterwards published as a pamphlet by the Society. As a whole *Faults of the Fabian* is the most explicit declaration of the Society's failure "either to organise, develop, or represent the spirit of social reconstruction *that is arising all about us.*"

It was a provocative paper. Wells meant to sting and stir his listeners, and he did both effectively. He charged the Society with inadequacy, attacked its special private style of joking and its aping of and playing-up to Shaw, accused it of failing in all its functions and especially in the

matter of propaganda. Things had changed altogether since the "old wild drawing-room days" of the 'eighties; a new spirit was in the air, and, for the middle classes, the Society was the appointed instrument to inform and direct that spirit. It was doing nothing of the kind; it was too small, too poor, too sluggish. It was still sleeping and didn't want to wake up. It dreamed of permeation, of a world made socialist without knowing it. He scoffed openly. "Make socialists and you will achieve socialism; there is no other way." That was the issue, the "practical" policy of permeation versus the adventure of open propaganda. He flung down the challenge to the Society to abandon its exclusiveness, to spread its net as widely as possible, to appeal to the younger generation the country over. He prophesied, even within a year, perhaps ten thousand members....

As a first step he asked for a committee to consider his scheme and put forward definite proposals. That was granted, but his insistence, against Executive opposition, that he should nominate its ten members, was a blunder to the extent that it exposed the Special Committee to attack as neither representative nor impartial. The Committee meetings began at once, but a report was not presented until October, partly owing to Wells's absence that spring in America. These meetings were not always peaceful, and especially towards the end there was dissension. "——'s rotting off and doesn't want to sign the report. Go and tonic him for God's sake," Wells dashed off in a hurried note to a fellow-member in September. Eventually agreement was reached. Towards the end of November the Executive circulated the 16-page Report, together with its own 27-page Reply, proposing resolutions for debate which were in effect a simple setting-aside of the Committee's work.

The Report was only partially a Wellsian production, and it went beyond the main points of the originating address to suggest the Society's running of Fabian Parliamentary candidates, a step which it was declared would "infuse socialism with new life and power as nothing else would."

The Executive Reply was more readable—clearly Shavian—but it made no attempt to be helpful. It rejected all the principal proposals as impracticable, and stated frankly that the Executive would have no change of policy while it remained in office. Thus the issue became the Executive versus Wells, the old leaders versus the new intruders. Appeal was made not to the judgment of the members, but to their loyalty.

On December 7th the battle was joined in the open meeting-hall. Wells proposed an amendment to approve the "spirit and purport" of the Report, and attacked the supercilious tone of the Executive Reply. His address was admirable in substance, but not well delivered; had he but been an orator of the quality of Shaw, suggests Mr. Pease, for long secretary and now historian of the Society, the Fabian future might have been very different. It was an irritated and irritating speech; Shaw's narrowing of the issue plainly disconcerted Wells, and in a note added to a report of his speech, hurriedly printed for circulation among members, he rejected the personal issue absolutely.

But Shaw would not be balked, and on his own initiative informed members that the Executive would resign and refuse re-election were the amendment carried. On December 14th he spoke magnificently, making what Mr. Pease describes as his finest speech to the Society, though it was unfortunately, only reported in summary. He secured at once an unfair advantage by accusing Wells of threatening to resign if defeated. Wells pledged himself not to do so. "That is a great relief to my mind," replied Shaw, "I can now pitch into Mr. Wells without fear of consequences." And he did! Relentlessly he forced the issue to surrender for one side or the other, until Wells withdrew his amendment, commenting that unlike the Englishmen of legend he knew when he was beaten. He said in a subsequent letter to the *Fabian News* that he gave way because he felt his defeat to be more honourable than Shaw's victory. "I am reluctantly taking up a secondary position for a time

in the campaign for an effectual reform of the Society's constitution, because of the perverse and partially successful efforts to represent this as my personal campaign." G. R. Stirling Taylor was so revolted by Shaw's diplomacy that he resigned his position on the Executive, accusing his colleagues—in a letter which the *Fabian News* refused to print—of making their prestige the issue because they were afraid to argue the Report on its merits.

There followed some minor engagements. Meanwhile throughout January and February Wells was preparing a list of Executive candidates who should at the next election sweep the older members out of office and make the way clear for the Reformers. (Not that all was peaceful even among them: "Don't explain so fully as you want to do," Wells begged his right-hand man, "that I am a fool, incompetent, untrustworthy, and don't 'stick to my guns' and so on. All that may wait. The job in hand is to get a Reform Executive elected, and quarrelling publicly among ourselves will do no good at all. Shut it.... Warmest affection—whom he loveth he abuseth.") But the March election brought little encouragement. A number of Reformers, including Wells, were successful, but it was *not* a Reform Executive. Thenceforward he emerged only rarely and with protest from the back seat he had voluntarily adopted, though he continued to lecture in London and occasionally to university and provincial groups and societies. Throughout 1907 he was writing *New Worlds for Old,* which aspired, the *Fabian News* announced, to be *the* text-book for middle-class propaganda: "Following the soundest Fabian traditions, proofs of the book have been read and numerous suggestions made by Sidney Webb, Bernard Shaw, and several other members of the Society."

§3

Evidently he found his double rôle as author and Fabian too much for him. Towards the end of 1907 he began to

disengage himself, resigning from various sub-committees on the ground that he lived too far away. He was, however, re-elected to the Executive in April 1908.

In the same month a new source of dissension appeared. A by-election was taking place in Northwest Manchester, the candidates being Joynson-Hicks (Conservative), Winston Churchill (Liberal) and Dan Irving of the Social Democratic Party. Wells wrote to the press, *as a socialist,* to say that as Irving stood no chance at all (and Wells didn't think much of the S. D. P. anyway) the socialist vote should go to Churchill, in whose "active and still rapidly developing and broadening mind" he recognised "a spirit entirely in accordance with the spirit of our movement." Beside this angel of light, Joynson-Hicks became "an exceptionally undesirable person... entirely undistinguished.... In contrast with Mr. Churchill's brilliant career and vivid personality, he is an obscure and ineffectual nobody." In the result Joynson-Hicks was elected, Dan Irving won only a handful of votes, and Churchill's champion was left to face a thickening storm of abuse from fellow-socialists. They addressed him offensively on postcards; they attacked him in the press; inevitably the matter cropped up in the Fabian Society.

Now Wells's political attitude was quite clear. He wanted above all things to keep socialism free from the taints and limitations of party politics. He didn't want, even, a single socialist party, believing that its existence would mean the substitution of ballot-box expediency for creative thought. He admitted that of all existing parties Labour had the strongest claim on socialist sympathies and support, but the claim was not exclusive; righteousness must be acknowledged wherever it appeared. Certainly he was influenced to this attitude by his belief that "the Labour Party is not a party co-extensive with the Liberal and Conservative Parties. These latter fight over practically the whole country; the former never has and never will. Whatever practical legislative work it wants to get done, therefore, must be done, can

only be done, through an understanding with one or other of the two national parties."[1] So he conceived the only hope for socialism to lie in a synthesis of the constructive elements in all parties; to identify it with Labour would mean, he held, the death of socialistic legislation for the next thirty years. (A Labour Government has yet to prove him mistaken.) The attitude was comprehensible, perhaps profound; where Wells went astray was in permitting his Committee to recommend political action, and subsequently (after declaring in his 1907 Executive Election address that he regarded the matter as "secondary and subordinate" and elsewhere that he regretted that it was forced upon him by his colleagues) in accepting a place upon a Political Committee which in Januuary 1908 reported in favour of a general development on the lines suggested by the earlier Special Committee. The Manchester letter was discussed at the annual meeting on May 22nd, 1908. Replying, Wells declined to consider himself bound to support any and every candidate who called himself a socialist. The next day he wrote to the *Fabian News* to state his view, held so strongly that, were it condemned, "I am prepared to resign my position on the Executive and to become a subscriber instead of a member of the Society." For in his view the Society was not political but existed for the study and propagation of the socialist *idea*; it was friendly to the Labour Party, but Executive and other members were absolutely unpledged, free to take any political action, either with or without consulting their colleagues. The Society had hitherto formed a valuable platform for the discussion of socialist methods and ideas, and "the prospect of its sinking to the position of one among several competing political socialist bodies" seemed to him altogether disastrous.

No reply or comment was printed, and the next appearance of his name—possibly he took silence for condemnation—was his letter in the September issue resigning membership and his place on the Executive. He was dis-

[1] *Socialism and Politics.*

contented with the activities of the Society, he said, and he objected to its basis—the latter primarily in its disregard of the responsibility of the State to women and children. "A scheme which proposes to leave mother and child economically dependent upon the father is to me not socialism at all, but a miserable perversion of socialism." Moreover, "I think the period of opportunity for a propaganda to the British middle classes on Fabian lines is at an end. That opportunity came and found us divided in theory and undecided in action. The petty growth that is going on is a mere mockery of the things we might have done.... It is to other media and other methods that we must look for the spread and elaboration of those collectivist ideas which all of us have at heart." The effort of wakening the Society seemed, in fact, no longer worth while. "Moreover, I want very much to concentrate myself now upon the writing of novels for some years, and so I have taken the alternative course and sent in my resignation."

The truth was that Wells had always wished to make of the Society something it didn't, really, in the least want to be; he desired not so much to reform as to recreate it. Yet what finally disconcerted and drove him out was perhaps not so much any of the stated issues, as a distaste for the Society's prevailing tone. Only the deep instinctiveness of this distaste can account for the lack of generosity which informs his subsequent references to the Fabians as, in Remington's phrase, "prigs at play." "Admirable Webblets, mysteriously honest, brightly efficient—bright with the shine of varnish rather than the gleam of steel! One sees these necessary, unavoidable servants of the workers' commonwealth—trusted servants—indispensable servants, in fact, authoritative and ruling servants—bustling virtuously about their carefully involved duties, and occasionally raising a neatly rolled umbrella to check the careless course of some irregular citizen, who had forgotten to button up his imagination or shave his character." [1] It was, to revert to the classifica-

[1] *The Labour Revolt.*

tion of *A Modern Utopia,* essentially the revolt of "poietic" against "kinetic," of the creative against the executive mentality; there lay the root of a conflict reaching altogether too far beneath the surface for any understanding or even sympathy. The trailing clouds of Wells's imaginative aspiration could never be confined within the bright neat despatch-boxes of a self-appointed expert bureaucracy.

One must ask: What did Wells do for the Society, the Society for Wells? He found it at a low ebb; he started to work for it at a time of new interest in socialism which he both anticipated and hastened. During the three years of his activity the membership increased by some three hundred per cent; new life stirred throughout the Society, and subject and local groups—Arts, Nursery, Biology, Local Government, Education, and so forth—were founded in London and the provinces. Following his exit, from 1909 onward, a dwindling in the rate of increase became progressively apparent; today, despite the spreading of socialist ideas in later years, the membership is considerably less than it was then, and many of the groups and provincial centres have ceased to exist.

Thus one can believe that Wells would have led the Society to greater things, and that Shaw in defeating him scored an unhappy and Pyrrhic victory. Or it can be doubted. Wells may be thought temperamentally incapable of sustained work with any organisation. His task is inspiration, suggestion, a pointing of the way. The Fabian Society is a training-ground; Wells, one feels, would have made it apocalyptic or nothing. Frankly, apocalyptic is the last thing one can imagine it.

What it did for Wells was to introduce him, however narrowly, to the machinery of practical politics, and, in consequence, to disgust him with the limitations of political necessities. Perhaps not less importantly, it brought him into contact with the younger generation in the universities and elsewhere.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NOVELIST OF LIFE

§ 1

WELLS justifiably rejects the suggestion of autobiography in *The New Machiavelli,* but as the political world into which Remington entered is admittedly that of Wells's experience as Coefficient and Fabian, so Remington's intellectual tendencies offer a certain parallel to those of his creator. Wells never came near political toryism, but like Remington he did shift from a modified imperialism into Fabianism, and from Fabianism to a conception of government by natural aristocracy. Similarly both became feminists; both expatiated upon the breakdown of the established marriage system; both urged the fundamental importance of the Endowment of Motherhood, and sought the building of men rather than battleships as the one sure shield of Britain. Both were eventually made to realise, with an overwhelming effect of futility, not merely the prevailing dissent from, but the total misunderstanding of, their views. The books following *Anticipations* trace a continuous development of ideas fundamental to Remington's thought: a positing of two types of men, the constructive and the acquiescent; a conception of Order as a Promethean rebel against prevailing Disorder; an insistence upon the importance and power of the idea, and a belief in the necessity of a common culture as the basis of any civilisation.

It was during the years—roughly 1901 to 1909—when these ideas were ripening to harvest that Wells's best work

was done. He was in that period the novelist of life. Later he became the novelist of ideas; later still, unless the term is stretched beyond meaning, a novelist only incidentally. He no longer sought to render life; he wanted to argue about it. At first this was not so. Ideas as such appeared to be strained away into sociological books and pamphlets, Fabian and allied activities; in the novels themselves he broke successfully through the web of ideas to the realisation of life. In *Kipps, The War in the Air, Tono-Bungay, The History of Mr. Polly,* he applied his sympathy, insight, humour and imagination to the sheer spectacle of life with a vigour and pungency unrivalled by any other living writer. In these years he was, as novelist, coming ever closer to his subject; realism, depth of understanding, grasp of intention and power of execution grew steadily—the element of scientific romance as steadily dwindled.

It dwindled not from any loss in imaginative capacity, but because he was focussing the latter more and more upon humanity, his questioning of which became intenser while his understanding grew deeper. He turned continuously from the possibilities of the universe (the objective spectacle) to the human problem (the subjective urgency). The immediate effect was the development of the humourist, for the natural Wells is the exuberant, amiable Cockney Englishman. When he writes from the heart he produces humour; the rest of his work is fundamentally if not evidently from the brain, which is why the love-episodes of his comic characters are invariably moving, while those of his Lady Marys and Benhams mostly inspire only an embarrassed incredulity:

" 'Cheetah,' she whispered almost inaudibly, 'Cheetah—I didn't understand. But now—I want to bear your child.'

"He was astonished. 'Old Leopard!' he said.

" 'No,' she answered, putting her hands upon his shoulders and drawing very close to him, 'Queen—if I can be—to your King.'

"'You want to bear me a child!' he whispered, profoundly moved." [1]

This success upon one plane, and failure upon the other, is one more characteristic which links him with Dickens, and indeed one sees him very much as a modern Dickens with the advantage of the discipline of the imagination that comes from a scientific training. On the whole Wells is more direct, more restrained, swifter in his effects and in his prose. Where Dickens let himself go, he holds himself in —but least in his more solemn emotional scenes.

As a novelist he moves between this assenting humour of the heart and the inquisitive analysis of the mind with curious variations. The intellectual realism of *Mr. Lewisham* started into new life with the casuistical monologues of Chaffery—first of that series of palatial conversationalists among whom Chitterlow, Ewart and Butteridge are especially memorable—and in the meeting of the Friends of Progress we have the first hint of that Dickensian mastery in handling crowds, and crowd-dialogue, which thenceforth appears repeatedly, notably in the funeral and wedding chapters of *Mr. Polly*. In *Kipps* the humourist is almost continuously present; the critical intelligence only occasionally intervenes. *In the Days of the Comet,* which Wells names as the last of his scientific romances,[2] is on the other hand dominated by the intellectual imagination, and humour is rare. Then, in *The War in the Air,* which follows it, the two aspects are conterminous. The setting of the story, and especially Bert's adventures with the German air-fleet and on Goat Island, have all the objective reality of the scientific romance, but the treatment of the Smallways family, of Grubb and Edna, and

[1] *The Research Magnificent.*

[2] I would give that distinction to *The Food of the Gods,* for the fantasy of the later book is fragile and dream-like; it is the fantasy of Utopia, and lacks altogether the compelling detail of the earlier visions of time and space. One remembers the story for the account of the world before the Change. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that while in the earlier romances (*The Time Machine, The First Men in the Moon*) the device itself is the starting-point of the story, in this book the device of the comet only followed the idea of a world-wide change of heart.

Kurt and Butteridge (cousin to Chitterlow), and the bright humanity of Bert throughout, bring it nearer *Kipps* than, say, *The War of the Worlds*. Very typical is the account of the battle of the North Atlantic, magnificently conceived as spectacle but given an intimate reality in the emotions of Bert and the German lieutenant. Humourist and social observer collaborate far less effectively in *Ann Veronica,* and then again in *Tono-Bungay* and *The History of Mr. Polly* they are totally divorced, the humourist in one expelled, in the other triumphing. In *Tono-Bungay,* as in no other book, all his powers, excepting only the humour and friendliness of *Kipps,* are woven together into one stupendous unity. It may not be a more truly poetic novel than *Mr. Polly*; it is certainly a greater. It is one of the two or three great English novels of this century. The ease of construction, the handling of detail, the grasp of character, the force of the writing, the cumulative power—all are masterly. Writing it, Wells came indeed to his climax as intellectual novelist. *Mr. Polly,* conversely, owes so little to the schematic interrogations of the intellect that it might be called simply an essay in exuberance; it has no plot, its movement is purely organic, its humour continuous, always vivid, always living, always loving, very real and very true. Briefer than *Kipps,* it keeps a more consistently high level; it is his master work as humourist—it is also his most human work. He sees the incongruities of life—to that degree he is still detached—but in his laughter he acknowledges his own kinship and participation.

And as his vision became increasingly intimate and extensive, so his prose grew in richness and power, capable alike of the conscious splendour of such passages as the description of New York in *The War in the Air,* or—an etching beside this glowing canvas—the idiosyncratically particularised delineation of Uncle Pentstemon in *Mr. Polly:*

"The City of New York was in the year of the German attack the largest, richest, in many respects the most splendid, and in some, the wickedest city the world has ever seen.

She was the supreme type of the City of the Scientific Commercial Age; she displayed its greatness, its power, its ruthless anarchic enterprise, and its social disorganisation most strikingly and completely. She had long ousted London from her pride of place as the modern Babylon, she was the centre of the world's finance, the world's trade, and the world's pleasure; and men likened her to the apocalyptic cities of the ancient prophets. She sat drinking up the wealth of a continent, as Rome once drank the wealth of the Mediterranean, and Babylon the wealth of the East. In her streets one found the extremes of magnificence and misery, of civilisation and disorder. In one quarter, palaces of marble, laced and crowned with light and flame and flowers, towered up into her marvellous twilights beautiful beyond description; in another a black and sinister polyglot population sweltered in indescribable congestion in warrens and excavations beyond the power and knowledge of government. Her vice, her crime, her law alike were inspired by a fierce and terrible energy, and like the great cities of medieval Italy, her ways were dark and adventurous with private war."

"His was an aged rather than a venerable figure. Time had removed the hair from the top of his head and distributed a small dividend of the plunder in little bunches carelessly and impartially over the rest of his features; he was dressed in a very big, old frock coat and a long cylindrical top hat, which he had kept on; he was very much bent, and he carried a rush basket, from which protruded coy intimations of the lettuces and onions he had brought to grace the occasion. He hobbled into the room, resisting the efforts of Johnson to divest him of his various encumbrances, halted, and surveyed the company with an expression of profound hostility, breathing hard."

One may span the gulf from the humorous vision to the intellectual by setting beside the latter quotation a sentence from *Tono-Bungay*: "These obscure, undignified people, a fat woman with asthma, an old Welsh milk-seller with a tumour on his bald head, who was the intellectual

leader of the set, a huge-voiced haberdasher with a big black beard, a white-faced, extraordinarily pregnant woman, his wife, a spectacled rate-collector with a bent back." How well Uncle Pentstemon, seen in detachment, would fit into that group, and yet one portrait attracts while the other repels, though each is true on its level. They are both intensive observations of life seen for its own sake. Even when the intellectual intention was most pressingly present it could not yet create a barrier to the contact of the artist with reality.

§ 2

Wells had been free of *Anticipations* by the end of 1900; *The Sea Lady,* the idea of which came to him suddenly on the Sandgate beach, was written in the same year. Then his course for a while seemed uncertain. In October 1901, he told Arnold Bennett that he was "meditating on a something which is really this time to get me altogether and reconcile all my aspects." It was to be "a lax extravaganza," reminiscent of Rabelais, with "interlocutors such as one gets in *Tristram Shandy*—discourses and Peacockian dialogue—an effect of looking into a room in which a number of human beings behave and talk, with someone like Father Shandy giving a lantern entertainment with comments." Some of the machinery of this is evidently to be found in *A Modern Utopia,* but the thing itself was never written. Another abandoned project was a series of highly critical short stories about the British Army. He tried to be "kindly but instructive," but gave up when it proved impossible to keep up "the tone of careless geniality." Only a fragment remains, printed in 1902 as *The Loyalty of Esau Common,* and perhaps *The Land Ironclads* (1903), that striking anticipation of the "tanks" of 1916.

In November appeared *Anticipations,* of which Wells had the highest hopes. "I want you to read it very much," he wrote to Bennett, *"and,* if it takes you, to do something to propagate my gospel. I believe quite simply that a real

first-class boom and uproar and discussion about this book will do an infinite amount of good in the country and to you at least there is no need to put my belief in breeches. I think I am safe to get most of the comfortable *educated* London public, but I dream of getting it read by parsons and country doctors and all that sort and going much wider than my publishers dream. I think there are a multitude of interesting quotes to be dug out of the book, about house conveniences, the status of unmarried girls, cooking in the future, building, dress, etc., that ought to *ground-bait* for the big public even—the Corellian public. (Some of the more denunciatory passages by the bye, when I read them over again, strike me as singularly like Marie.) I think you are right about that turgidity in places—but the thing has been a hell of a handful to manage." In fact it did "boom." More than eight editions were printed within a year, an extraordinary number for such a work, and the public was forced for the first time to realise his intellectual stature and energy.

This success encouraged him to embark upon *Mankind in the Making,* an elaborate but rather heavy-handed attempt to review the social organisation as an educational process; he terms it one of his most conscientiously written and least satisfactory books. It was evidently engendered under the impulse of a still novel parenthood; and a similar interest in babies, nurseries, the gradual training of the dawning intelligence, and educational matters generally, is apparent in *The Food of the Gods* (written 1903), that fantastic parable of New Republicanism in conflict with the thing that is.

At last, also in 1903, *Kipps* was begun—Wells's first novel since *Love and Mr. Lewisham.* It is, as we have it, a fairly bulky volume; but its original conception betrays a truly Dickensian fecundity of invention. Its title was *The Wealth of Mr. Waddy.* A complete Part One was written (and set aside and subsequently lost) in which old Mr. Waddy, grandfather of Kipps who had yet to come on the scene, and Mr. and Mrs. Chitterlow, were leading char-

acters. "And after Kipps had been ruined by young Mr. Walsingham, there were to have been the adventures of young Mr. Walsingham as a fugitive in France."[1] But Wells soon realised that such a work was commercially quite impracticable, and so the outline was shaped to its present form. Naturally and deservedly it has always been one of Wells's best-selling books.

In *A Modern Utopia,* written in 1904, when *Kipps* was still in hand, he cast for all to see the implications of *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making* into dramatic and visual form. This dream of a world nobler in every way than our own, and yet not infinitely remote or unattainable, took at the time a tremendous hold on his imagination. He has at no time cared to talk much even to intimate friends of work in progress, but in this case he would, exceptionally, walking over the Kentish countryside with a young friend then living for a while at Spade House, speak almost nostalgically of this Utopia, of its people and its ways, as of some country he had actually known and lived in. As with *Kipps,* the final form of *A Modern Utopia* was settled only after more than one beginning. He aimed at a "lucid vagueness," and rejected the straightforward essay as altogether too hard and fast in its choice of simple alternatives. His aim, still essentially deriving from his "rediscovery of the unique," was not to limit speculation to "so" and "not-so," but to suggest the widest possibilities. He tried "a recognised method of viewing questions from divergent points that has always attracted me and which I have never succeeded in using," the discussion novel of Peacock and Mallock, and then "a shape resembling a little the double personality of Boswell's Johnson, a sort of interplay between monologue and commentator."[2] It became eventually perhaps the most characteristic—the most Wellsian—of all his books, both original in form and authentic in its originality. Its shot-

[1] Atlantic Edition, Volume 8, Preface.
[2] *A Modern Utopia: Note to the Reader.*

"Arthur Kipps, Esq."
(INSCRIBED IN MR. STRAUS'S COPY)

silk texture, as he calls it, between philosophical (or sociological) discussion and imaginative narrative, presents a union of thinker and artist more satisfying than any of the misalliances of later years, and one which, if cultivated, might have led to the establishment of a form at once more imaginative and more intellectually forceful than, for example, *The World of William Clissold* or *Meanwhile*. William James, whom Wells regards as an influence as important to his maturity as Huxley to his youth, wrote especially applauding the way in which "you beautifully soften cocksureness by the penumbra of the outlines,"[1] and Henry James, after his fashion, was abject in admiration: "I am lost in amazement at the diversity of your genius. As in everything you do... it is the quality of your intellect that primarily (in the *Utopia*) obsesses and reduces me—to that degree that even the colossal dimensions of your Cheek (pardon the term that I don't in the least invidiously apply) fails to break the spell. Indeed your cheek is positively the very sign and stamp of your genius."[2] The book had a considerable and steady sale, and awoke in many hearts, especially of young people, an intermittent aspiration to establish the Samurai as a living fact here and now. Wells was not encouraging. "The only reason for such an Order," he said, "is the economy and development of force, and under existing conditions disciplines would consume more force than they would engender."[3] But he presided at a public discussion of the subject held in London in April 1907, under the auspices of the Fabian Arts Group, and there urged the benefits of a distinctive discipline, and the obligation to study and be intelligent. There was a danger of priggishness, but better prig than pig. Shaw, always Shavian, criticised the discipline as too lax. Mrs. Webb, staunchly Fabian, accepted priggishness: "A prig is a person selected by himself to guide the world."[4]

[1] *Letters of William James.*
[2] *Letters of Henry James.*
[3] *First and Last Things.*
[4] *New Age*, May 2nd, 1907.

§ 3

THE opening book of *In the Days of the Comet,* written in 1905, is almost a first study in the style of *Tono-Bungay*; the reasonable man looks at his world and sees that it is bad, that is to say, unreasonable. Its later sections, however, go altogether beyond the aspirations even of *A Modern Utopia* to present a vision as remote from reality, Wells himself said, as the Kingdom of Heaven. Upon publication the anti-socialist newspapers accused it of preaching free love as the socialist ideal, and Wells had again and again to repudiate the allegation and even threaten legal proceedings. It was in addition, with *Kipps,* involved in the silences and suppressions of the Times Book Club War, a long-forgotten trade squabble, and this led Wells to prophesy the death "amid these disorders of book-selling" of the extensive carefully written novel. "He wanted very much to write novels; he thought he could do it better than anything else; but he wasn't going to spend his life planning and polishing novels simply to have them shied into the waste-paper box in the course of some fresh and still more idiotic development of 'book war.' " [1]

The point was, just then, an important one, for already, in 1905, he was at work on the longest and most carefully planned and written of all his works up to that time, *Tono-Bungay*. Essentially it was the fruit of his sociological writings. There he had studied the anatomy of his subject as the art-student studies the anatomy of the body; here, with a vision penetrating to the very bones, he presented it. The reformer had yet to step in; George Ponderevo was excited by the contemplation of what was, not of what might be. A cross-section of Edwardian society, the book had to be a big one. Where *The Wheels of Chance, Mr. Lewisham* and *Kipps* had concentrated upon single types or groups, *Tono-Bungay* opened out to a panorama of that

[1] *The Book Man's Burden.*

"strange advertising commercialised civilisation of which London is the centre." [1] Its planning may be dated from the suicide of Whitaker Wright in the London Law Courts early in 1904, following his conviction for fraud, an incident which so impressed Wells that it appears in both *The Research Magnificent* and *Clissold*. On its completion in 1908 Wells fully realised and told a friend that he would never do better, that he had reached the peak of his achievement and thenceforth would decline rather than rise. But others were slow to share his conviction of its merit; the novel was rejected as a serial by the important London newspapers, and its reception as a book, despite the applause of the critics, was disappointing to a hopeful author.

Again and again during its writing it was set aside; there was the Fabian squabble, the trip to America, the writing of *New Worlds for Old, First and Last Things,*[2] and *The War in the Air.*

The last was intended less as a prophecy of the "German peril" than a simple forecast of the changes in warfare consequent upon the development of flying, which made war infinitely more destructive and yet vastly less conclusive. Wells had always been interested in aviation as a practical possibility. He had introduced a flying-machine into an early version of *The Time Machine,* and thenceforward aeroplanes blundered soaring and humming (and frequently crashing) in and out of his short stories and speculations concerning the future. In 1901 he was derided because he prophesied successful flight "long before 2000 and very probably before 1950." [3] He made his first ascent with Grahame-White just eleven years later.

The next two books were both in a sense fragments. *Ann Veronica,* begun while *Tono-Bungay* was still in hand,

[1] *Mr. Wells Explains Himself.*
[2] This "confession of faith and rule of life" originated in a lecture on *The Faith I Hold* delivered to the Fabian Society in December 1907, and was later expanded to three lectures for the benefit of the Fabian Nursery Group.
[3] *Anticipations.*

returns to the narrower study of a single personality, but it was planned much more comprehensively, and only cut short because it developed unsatisfactorily. At the time when *The History of Mr. Polly* was conceived, early in 1909, Wells was in a mood of happy experiment. Two short stories written at this time, *My First Aeroplane* and *Little Mother up the Mörderburg,* must be noted for their singularity in Wells's work. They are high-spirited farce, entirely improbable and full of play upon words. They were meant to open a series, but though Wells enjoyed writing them they failed to please him and he did not continue. *Mr. Polly* itself was begun in a mood in which, Wells has remarked, he felt he could go on writing for ever. Having brought the story up to the Fishbourne fire, when Polly was evidently ready to be launched into a world of endless possibilities, he proposed the publication of the story in an indefinite number of periodical parts, after the fashion of Dickens. But his publisher doubted the financial prospect, and a masterpiece was thus, so to speak, cut off in its youth.

Yet one is forced to wonder whether the mood could have been sustained. For with the publication of *Ann Veronica* in October 1909, another phase opened, and *The New Machiavelli,* which was in hand before the end of the year, was in temper and purpose as different as might be from the golden gaiety of *Mr. Polly.*

CHAPTER NINE

THE NOVELIST OF IDEAS

§ 1

EARLY in 1909 Wells wrote to Henry Arthur Jones from Sandgate: "I want very much to leave this place and live in London soon by reason of a web of those almost impalpable reasons that affect people of our temperament." Spade House was sold in May, and by August the family was installed at 17 Church Row, Hampstead, a pleasant eighteenth-century house affording from its windows a view over London to the Surrey Hills.

Thus having sown at Sandgate he came to town to reap the whirlwind. *Ann Veronica* was published in October. It is not one of his best books, though it has more merit than many critics allow; it has the quality of life, and an easy wit ripples continually across its surface. And if topical it was also germinative; to read it today—and to recall the execration poured upon it—is to appreciate the free realism which even the average post-war novel exercises in depicting the relations of the sexes. Most of the reviews were temperate and even favourable; the *Spectator* was the first to work itself up into what Wells described as a "fit of apoplexy, unhappily not fatal." [1] In a review credited to Mr. C. L. Graves, the book was condemned with "loathing and indignation" as "capable of poisoning the minds of those who read it" by "the slime of its faint-scented sophistries." The "muddy world of Mr. Wells's imaginings" was

[1] *Record of the Old Students Association,* March 1910.

said to know neither self-control nor self-sacrifice. "His is a community of scuffling stoats and ferrets, unenlightened by a ray of duty or abnegation." [1] Thus far no particular odium had attached to the book, but it is a truism that what the *Spectator* prints on Saturday the Church of England preaches on Sunday, and soon obscure North-country canons were denouncing it as more dangerous than typhoid, and the public libraries banning and boycotting it to the great benefit of the booksellers. An inconclusive correspondence followed in which Wells stated: "My book was written primarily to express the resentment and distress which many women feel nowadays at their unavoidable practical dependence upon some individual man not of their deliberate choice, and in full sympathy with the natural but perhaps anarchistic and anti-social idea that it is intolerable for a woman to have sexual relations with a man with whom she is not in love, and natural and desirable and admirable for her to want them and still more so to want children by a man of her own selection." [2] He recanted nothing; more than ever was he determined to make the novel an instrument of honest thought and frank speech. "The novel hasn't moved on for twenty years," he wrote to a friend in 1908. "It still keeps the stock characters and moral conventions of 1881. We are a whole generation away from that—a new race." [3] "Life is filthy with sentimental lying," he declared in his introduction to the autobiography of George Meek. "Every man who would tell of reality does it at his personal cost amidst a chorus of abuse."

The History of Mr. Polly came in the following April as indeed a sop to Cerberus; even the *Spectator* was appeased, and once more the tail visibly wagged the dog. But in May, with the publication of the first chapters of *The New Machiavelli* in the *English Review,* it became only too evident that the trespasser was again descending on the

[1] *Spectator,* November 20th, 1909.
[2] *Spectator,* December 4th, 1909.
[3] Letter to Caldwell Harpur.

wrong side of the fence. A movement was initiated to prevent the novel's appearance in book form, and it was rejected by two or three London publishers. As this became known, and what Arnold Bennett called "ignoble tittle-tattle" about the nature of the book spread far and wide, back numbers of the *English Review* were bought up eagerly at enhanced prices. Things went so far that, at Wells's suggestion, a printed *Select Conversation* between himself and Ralph Straus was sent out with each review copy. This had been written by Straus for John Lane's house-organ, the *Bodleian,* and in it Wells repudiated the charges of portraiture and eroticism. The "suppressors" now hoped for a press boycott. It failed completely; at most four papers adhered to it, and elsewhere the reception, considering the susceptibilities the book undoubtedly wounded, was positively generous. The eroticism was seen to be non-existent, but suggestions of portraiture and also of autobiography persisted. For the latter there was no justification; it was not even relevant to the merits of the novel as such, and Wells naturally resented it. "I am in a state of wholesome stupidity here," he wrote to Bennett from Switzerland, "but I rejoice you are going for the 'suppressors' generally in the *E.R.* The *N.M.* is having an enormous press and I am only getting offensive things from fools like ——— ——— who *will* twist the book into autobiography (I say!—if we *did* write autobiography!)."

For the allegation of portraiture he was perhaps not without responsibility. *The New Machiavelli* is a great novel; it boils and bubbles with vitality; its intellectual vigour is astoundingly sustained; a life's experience pours into its pages with an inexhaustible generosity of passionate thought and feeling. But it is a bitter book. Necessarily in a representation of the Edwardian political world certain figures or their analogues—the Webbs were the obvious outstanding example—had to appear. Today Wells feels that he should have set them boldly in his novel under their own names, as other persons appear in *Clissold.* In-

stead "under the influence of the old tradition, I put in some people in the place of the Webbs, rather like them, but not exactly them. These phantoms who were like but yet not identified with my friends, got worked into the story. One was amused to invent things about them, and one did so because one had released oneself from direct statement.... Everyone said, naturally enough, that I had made a malicious caricature." [1] It has, even today, the effect if not the intention of malice; no one could be pleased to suggest in any way either Oscar or Altiora Bailey. The book gave the impression, as a reviewer noted, of a man paying back old scores; it does not portray, it pillories; it indicts a whole class, almost a nation, with a relentless ferocity so personal in its delivery that one can understand the inability to believe that it was not directed towards actual, rather than invented, beings.

But in fact the resentment went deeper than any one or two books. "Recently," wrote Wells in 1911, "I have had the apparent bad fortune to get myself disliked by a group of eminent and influential persons. They are going, I am told, to obliterate me. My luck is out at last, and I am doomed. I was on the high road to be a mere successful novelist, like dozens, and then a certain openness of speech and my natural carelessness of other people's standards led to this hostility. There has been in the last two years an organised attempt to suppress Wells, and it is still, I understand, going on. At one time it looked so promising that even Mr. Clement Shorter plucked up courage to insult me in print.... The disapproval of influential persons was to kill my best work unborn. It was to appear in an awful silence and freeze and die. Then I should freeze and die, and people like Mr. Graves would be almost happy." [2] Conservative critics had indeed come to the conclusion that Wells was a poisonous influence for the young, and especially for young women. They were prepared to allege, on

[1] *Way the World is Going: Future of the Novel.*
[2] *My Lucky Moment.*

the strength of a few books and manufactured misquotations, that he was not only a socialist but (like all socialists!) a free love propagandist and enemy of marriage. Actually he was (like most socialists) nothing of the kind, holding monogamic marriage to be "the specific human grouping," but believing too that the system when too rigidly enforced entailed suffering, and that for individual cases a possibility of considerable variation might be desirable. They charged him with feminism. He declared the economic independence of mother and child essential to any socialism. They could see the Endowment of Motherhood only as the Endowment of Immorality, curiously confusing two phenomena only incidentally linked. He was sympathetic to the Suffragette Movement, though deprecatory of its methods. They felt him to be worse than the women, for he advocated not only the Vote, but economic freedom and "an entire new system of relations between men and women, that will be free from servitude, aggression, provocation, or parasitism." [1]

But these grounds of attack were not permitted to suffice; it was thought expedient to supplement them with impertinent personal gossip. Matters came quickly to such a pass that complete strangers knew much more of Wells's private life than he did himself. One may conjecture whether such suggestions were not in any case inevitable. Wells has always been eager to experience the multitudinous sensations of living, to override all exclusive barriers, to come close to the heart of things; he has cared little for appearances and conventions when they offered to bar his way, and least of all in his friendships with women. Like many another artist—and Wells *is* that—he finds in their company a satisfaction and completion which only the dull or base will regard as sexual in the restricted sense of that unhappy word.[2] "I have had some lovely friendships. I wouldn't give up any of that beauty and intimacy for the

[1] *Englishman Looks at the World: The Great State.*

[2] "Humanity is obsessed by sex. I have always been disposed to take sex rather lightly, and think we make a quite unnecessary amount of fuss about it." *Mr. Asquith Will Die.*

world." The gossip flourished, but no story of meanness or betrayal has ever faced the light. *No* story has ever faced the light. There is no story that cannot face the light. The paper of his study at Easton Glebe bore the garter and *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. That states his case. It may be that he has transgressed against codes of conduct to which he never subscribed. One day it was urged in his company that a certain person under given circumstances could, as a gentleman, have behaved only in a stipulated way. Wells dissented; he would have preferred the man to use his intelligence. "But then," he added, "I'm *not* a gentleman." His life, he suggests in effect, may not always have been conventional; it has always, in his view, been civilised.

This running fire of criticism and gossip broke for a season into practically open attack. There was something like an organised campaign of furtive warnings and underhand scandal. He was represented as a sort of inky Casanova. The intention was to end for ever his influence with the younger generation, but that was not the effect: "So far from extinguishing me, I have been given an artificial and exaggerated importance. I have become a symbol against the authoritative, the dull, the presumptuously established, against all that is hateful and hostile to youth and tomorrow. They have thrust youth and tomorrow into my undeserving hands." [1] So it was. In the few brief years left before the outbreak of war, which ended many things, he was the outstanding champion of the younger generation. "He was our standard-bearer," declared Mr. Middleton Murry in 1916, "and fought for us so bravely that when he failed we failed with him." [2]

He entered defiantly upon his new leadership: "I dread nothing unless it is a biography by Mr. Shorter." The knowledge of hostility and unfair criticism braced him against his "easy disposition to be propitiatory and accommodating, to take the pleasant things of life as they come,

[1] *My Lucky Moment.*
[2] *Evolution of an Intellectual.*

to call everybody good fellow, lapse into the mood of after-dinner speeches." [1]

What he lapsed into was, instead, the mood of *Boon,* of which the main portions, *The Mind of the Race* and *The Wild Asses of the Devil,* were written now, though not published—pseudonymously—until 1915. It is his most intimate and revealing book, yet comparatively little known. In *The New Machiavelli* he had turned and rent his world; in *Boon* he mocked it, irritably. He "guyed" all the literature of his day; he questioned, in a mood of basic disbelief, even his own aspirations. He was, in this phase, not at all apt to suffer fools gladly—and who was not a fool?—and with relief he took his family to Pont-de-l'Arche, in Northern France, for all that summer of 1911.

§ 2

The year 1911, though its significance has been obscured by 1914, was a turning-point in national and even European affairs. Many writers have noted the coronation of King George V as marking a transition from social stability to increasing lawlessness. Class fought with class, nation threatened nation, and at home and abroad men put their trust only in force. Britain and Germany cried for bigger and bigger battleships, bigger and bigger armies; Capital and Labour for bigger and bigger lock-outs, bigger and bigger strikes.

Wells has always been critical of national achievements and aspirations, and his doubts of his country's "efficiency" and imperial honesty had grown steadily since the Boer War; they were stimulated now to a very active expression. As a frequent contributor to the newspapers, he questioned Britain's army, its navy, its social and industrial organisation, the quality of its education and its thought. In all these things the country seemed to him, compared with other

[1] *My Lucky Moment.*

nations, losing whatever leadership it had. The King called upon it to Wake Up; Wells could see few signs of it doing anything of the kind. His doubts spread wider. Could civilisation itself, he asked, hold together in the face of a great financial crisis or a world-war?

He hadn't, fortunately for his peace of mind, much real belief in the bare possibility of the latter. He was sceptical even of the reality of the German menace. "Swaggering bad manners" this talk of Blood and Iron might be, but actually he felt that there were limits to human stupidity, and he doubted too the practical working of the German war-machine. Should the Mailed Fist strike, it would, he imagined, simply drag an attenuated body after it to destruction. Nevertheless he criticised the British naval and military establishments upon practical grounds as inefficient, forecasting the main facts of the subsequent naval war.

Early in 1912 he opened a discussion in the *Daily Mail* on *The Labour Unrest*. He pointed to the change in the temper of Labour since the 'eighties. Essentially it rejected the leadership of its "betters"; it looked for salvation neither to them nor to Parliament, a distrust which directly resulted in the development of the strike as a weapon of offence. Even so early he perceived the widespread discontent with democratic elective government which the Great War did much to accelerate and make plain. He was especially concerned with the problem of reforming the House of Commons—the House of Lords being beyond any reform but abolition. In 1913 he declared himself a Liberal "by nature and necessity; it is a far deeper, more essential thing in me than the socialism of my dreams or the collectivism of my economics";[1] and the scandals of the Liberal Party in that year made him call for the elimination of the professional party politician (farthest of all men from social realities), and the restoration of representative government by the adoption of Proportional Representation, an electoral reform

[1] *What Are the Liberals to Do?*

in which he had been interested for some years past. He had written in 1908 to Mr. J. H. Humphreys, the indefatigable secretary of the Proportional Representation Society: "I think the Proportional Representation movement one of the most important and hopeful of the times, and only want of leisure and energy prevents my coming into it and working hard for it. P. R. would I believe *revolutionise* contemporary politics, an entirely beneficial revolution." He was "heart and soul" with the movement, he said a year later. In 1917, under the stress of war, he was to take up its active propaganda.

It was the basis of all his criticism that the times had changed—that change was indeed the very essence of the times—and that in the face of this evident fact men were still striving to understand and manage affairs, in military, industrial, educational and administrative spheres, as though nineteenth-century conditions still prevailed. He wanted an awakening of the national imagination. Where there is no thought the people perish, he cried continually: "The thought of a community is the life of a community." [1] Only the mass of the people, thinking hard and in general accord if not in individual agreement, could bring into being the great Leisure State "world-wide in its interests and outlook and catholic in its tolerance and sympathy, a system of great individual freedom with a universal understanding among its citizens of a collective thought and purpose." [2]

So, month by month and year by year, he talked and wrote, while the heedless world went by. Labour organised; Capital squandered; Germany armed; Ulster drilled; Lord Roberts exhorted; the Suffragettes burnt and smashed and shrieked; the politicians exhibited their dirty linen in the House of Commons and their dirty honours in the House of Lords; "Yip-i-addy-i-ay-i-ay" twirled and twanged the barrel-organs in the streets. So the orchestra tuned up for its noisy outburst, and the shot at Sarajevo was no more

[1] *Boon.*
[2] *Englishman Looks at the World: The Great State.*

than the tap of the conductor's baton to announce the moment of breathless silence before the breaking of the overwhelming storm.

§ 3

In these years Wells was entering, even conspicuously, upon a comfortable middle age of prosperity and literary eminence. It was evident that he was not to be suppressed, and all that remained was acceptance. In 1912 he acquired Little Easton Rectory, in Easton Park near Dunmow, Essex, taking it first mainly as a refuge for a busy writer ("We fattens 'im and 'e yields almost three books a year," he wrote in a copy of *Mr. Britling* in 1916), but soon moving the family there from Hampstead, a small flat sufficing for visits to London. "We're rooting here firmly," he told Arnold Bennett in 1913, and the Rectory, enlarged within and without, and its name presently changed to the more familiar Easton Glebe, remained thenceforward until 1930 his permanent home.

His was a happy existence. Of its common course the early chapters of *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* offer an account precise in spirit if not in every detail. Certainly the Dower House is, photographically, Easton Glebe, and in 1916 Wells told a correspondent that "the German tutor is an actual portrait, squirrel, Esperanto and all, of one of my young son's tutors." [1] There was, too, the same open hospitality, the hockey and the other games on Sundays, the dressing-up, the dancing in the barn, and behind and about it all the steady drive of continuous intellectual labour. Wells himself was probably never healthier or more active than at this time; the ailments of the 'nineties were left far behind; the catarrhal troubles of later years had scarcely appeared. The familiar photograph by Hoppé, taken then, gives admirably the fine upper profile and the massive shaping of

[1] Letter to William Farren.

the head, though it cannot render the living vigour of eyes and expression and movement.

He travelled much, mostly in France and Switzerland and on the Mediterranean coasts. Sometimes he would go farther afield. In January 1914 he spent a fortnight in Russia, visiting Petersburg and Moscow, with an intervening week-end at a country house on the bank of the river Volkhov in the district of Novgorod. While in Petersburg he went with Maurice Baring to a session of the Duma, to find his attention continually drawn from the speakers to a tremendous portrait of the Tsar, military as any German Emperor, which hung vastly over the assembly, a mockery of and insult to its very existence. The Russians he found unexpectedly like the English, with the fundamental difference that the former were religious where the latter were merely respectable. He came home bearing memories of a hundred lovely scenes—the black and gold shops of Petersburg, "the Kremlin's clustering domes and cupolas and crosses glowing in the soft sunlight of a mild winter's afternoon, and beyond it all Moscow with every cross aflame," a sunset seen through the high arched yokes above the horses' heads as he drove along the frozen river. But what principally impressed him, forgetting that incident of the Duma, was the unlikeness of *this* Russia to the legendary land of "wolves, knouts, serfdom, and cruelty."[1] It was a revelation which prevented him from sharing that distrust of Tsarist Russia felt by so many British socialists in the early days of the war.

§ 4

It is, however, neither the man nor the journalist, but the novelist, who is of importance in this period. Yet it is a novelist with a difference; he becomes the novelist of ideas. The novel, he said, in a plain-speaking lecture delivered to subscribers to the Times Book Club and later printed in

[1] *Russia and England: A Study in Contrasts.*

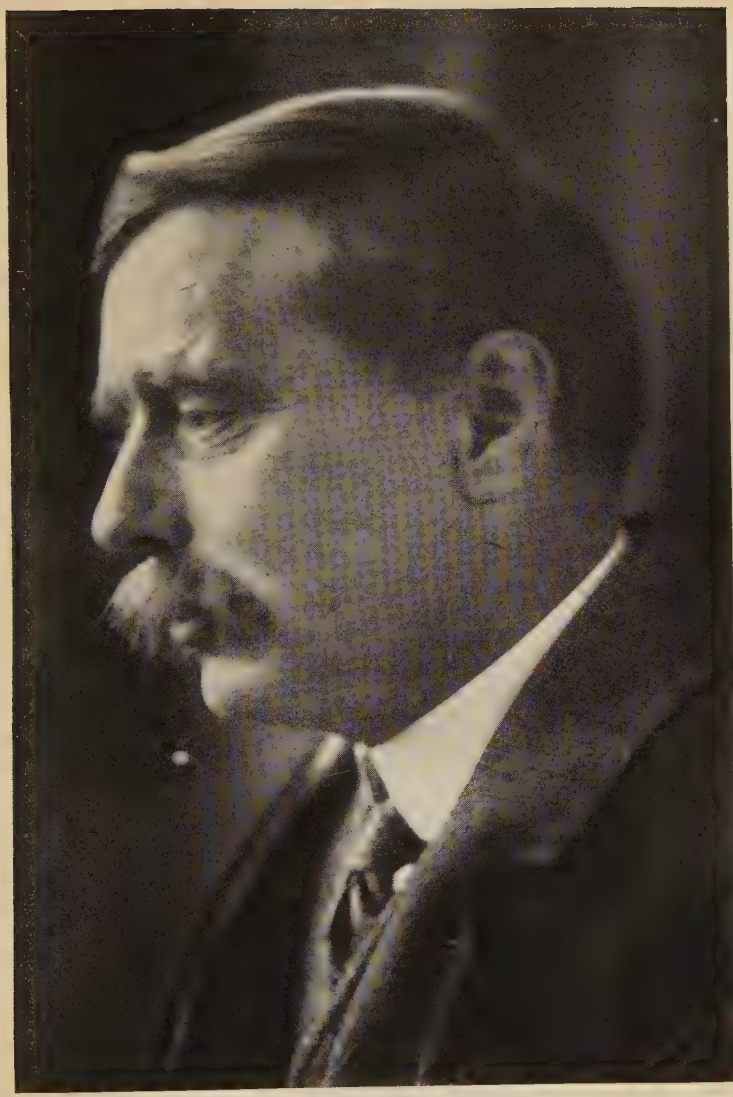


PHOTO E. O. HOPPÉ

SUCCESS (1911)

An Englishman Looks at the World as *The Contemporary Novel,* must be about life, about every human experience. In particular it must discuss "the problems which are being raised in such bristling multitude by our contemporary social development."

The two essential problems were defined, by Stephen Stratton in *The Passionate Friends,* as the servitude of sex and the servitude of labour. To both he offered science and socialism (inseparable, indeed identified) as a solution ... for the future. With labour he had had as a Fabian already grappled objectively, retiring somewhat baffled. Now he sought to attack it anew from the subjective standpoint of the individual man and woman, thus bringing together both problems in a true and universal relationship. In the novels of these years, from *The New Machiavelli* to *The Research Magnificent,* we see, in Wells's image, men (and occasional women too), who have eaten the Food of the Gods, caught in the toils of the Sea Lady. Sometimes sex is victor, sometimes vanquished—temporarily; always it hampers and blinds and diverts. In all these books men and women are shown struggling against the dark frustrations of sex, to realise a purpose, a form of belief, a plan of work. On the whole, in *Marriage, The Passionate Friends,* and *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman,* the sexual element predominates, but the quest for a purpose, as appears from *The Research Magnificent,* is the fundamental factor and so ultimately more important. The earlier volumes do not so much offer a solution as pose an aspiration. When writing them Wells in truth saw no way out. Only in the last does the aspiration itself appear as the solution.

Thus he could in the earlier books do no more than state a dissatisfaction with existing sexual codes—in particular "the uniform standardised implacable marriage of contemporary civilisation, concentrated not upon children and the future but upon a household and contemporary stability" [1]—and illustrate its distressing consequences by the

[1] Atlantic Edition, Volume 16, Preface.

portrayal of typical cases. "When the novelist cannot explain life he must draw it and leave it at that," Wells wrote in an early version, later amended, of the Atlantic Edition Preface to *Marriage*. In fact these novels did not do quite that—certainly not in the sense that it had been done in, for example, *Tono-Bungay*. In 1917 he called these novels his Prig Novels, not unjustifiably but for the wrong reason. Their protagonists are consciously priggish, not in their failure to realise that what they move towards is religion and God, but because of their remoteness from what they so exorbitantly theorise about—life itself. And the abstraction grew. Remington was at least an active factor in contemporary politics. Trafford, in *Marriage,* shifted from these immediate realities to the study of contemporary thought; Stratton, in *The Passionate Friends,* went about the world initiating grandiose educational schemes; Benham soared still higher in *The Research Magnificent* in his conception of world-government by a natural aristocracy. The movement is from humanity itself to ideas about humanity, and it is paralleled by the change from the drawing of life to its statement and discussion. The novels become less and less about life, more and more about problems; the latter rise, a thickening mist, between the author and his rendering of a living reality. Like Boon's "Mr. Mallup" in the Villa by the Sea, an amazingly versatile Owner of the Voice appears first as this character and then as that, and from book to book the discussion goes on, recognisably the same but moving continually farther from life. The æsthetic result can only be described as more gas and less light. Humour fades, drama dissolves into exposition. The characters decreasingly speak for themselves in that dialogue Wells can still—occasionally—use so well; they are sketches rather than creations. The prose grows manifestly less vigorous, the creative phrase less frequent. He remains potentially a master-novelist to the present day, but—in the last twenty years—more by inborn talent than any intention. No one will deny the humour of the opening chapters of *Marriage*

and of parts of *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman,* or, much later, of pages of *The Dream* (that of *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* is another matter), and one might select from the later books a whole gallery of minor—and one or two major—portraits, but essentially these things are extraneous to his purpose, and certainly since the outbreak of the war the criticism of his work as art must be considered at any rate personally irrelevant.

Marriage, written at Pont-de-l'Arche in 1911, deals like *Ann Veronica* with the younger generation. It might indeed be described as the story of Ann Veronica's marriage, with Mr. Pope for Mr. Stanley, Magnet for Manning, Marjorie as a more beautiful but less attractive Ann Veronica, and Trafford as a Capes who wouldn't give way to necessity—and then did—and rebelled. *The Passionate Friends* belongs mainly to 1912. Wells wrote to Bennett at the time of its publication: "I'm glad you like the book, which I mistrust myself as the end of a phase. The next will be quite different." It didn't, actually, end a phase at all, and "the next," presumably *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman,* written in 1913, was different rather in manner than in matter. In fact, it is almost *The Passionate Friends* done in a vein of not very patient comedy. In my opinion the later book is the better, and its heroine a more pleasing lady than Mary Christian; it contains, side by side with the divagations of Mr. Brumley, some excellent comedy. *The Research Magnificent* was begun towards the end of 1913, and finished early in 1915; it was most carefully planned and as carefully written, and it contains the most extensive exposition of the New Republican in action in the pre-war world to be found in any of Wells's books. Like most of his more deliberately conceived works, it was not conspicuously successful.

The four novels were the principal products of the period; none of the other volumes compares with them in importance, and only two, *The World Set Free* and *Bealby,* call for comment. The former was written quickly and

on impulse in the early summer of 1913, when Wells had taken refuge among the Swiss Alps from the turmoil of the move from Hampstead to Little Easton. "I've suddenly broken out into one of the good old scientific romances again," he informed Simmons, "and I want to know quite the latest about the atomic theory and sources of energy. I've read and mastered Soddy's very good little book and I want more. My idea is taken from Soddy. Men are supposed to find out how to set up atomic degeneration in the heavy elements just as they found out long ago how to set up burning in coal. Hence limitless energy. Will you do me the kindness to write under the enclosed just whatever books you think will give me tips for this? ... As I haven't done anything of this sort for some time I'm quite amused.... I shall telephone you when I get to London and we must meet to celebrate my return to Science." *Bealby* was a return, on the other hand, to the manner of *Mr. Polly,* but in a very different mood. Wells acknowledges that it "betrays a writer intensely irritated by his world.... All the characters are pelted with derision and misfortune." [1] It is in that altogether characteristic of its period, throughout which Wells was frankly at odds with his social environment. It was written early in 1914, and the serial publication began in August. On the 4th of August the curtain of war rolled down upon an act which, with *Bealby* in print and *The Research Magnificent* planned to its ending, was actually and not arbitrarily at an end.

[1] Atlantic Edition, Volume 17, Preface.

BOOK THREE

THE PROPHET OF WORLD ORGANISATION

1914-1930

CHAPTER TEN

THE PATRIOT

§ 1

"IN THOSE first days of August," records Mr. Philip Guedalla, "when the War swept across Europe like the wind out of Africa, there was an ugly rush of innumerable Pilots to weather the Storm. Mr. Wells hurried into his oilskins, Mr. Arnold Bennett jumped into his sea-boots, and the Poet Laureate heaved a melodious but archaic lead. By the fifth day of the French mobilisation the autumn publishing season was in full swing, and the Society of Authors clustered round Sir Edward Grey, ingeminating like Wilkins's Emma that it would never desert him. It was as though the usual old gentleman in the usual *Punch* cartoon had inquired from his window, 'Watchman, what of the night?' and had been answered by the clear utterance of eight novelists, five poets, and Mr. Joseph McCabe. The mast was almost invisible under the mass of colours that had been nailed to it." [1] That was certainly the effect, and the war came as a clarion call to none more positively than to Wells. Thenceforward work for the World State "ceased to be a subject for discussion and exalted resolution and became as a matter of course the general form of life for a reasonable man of good will." [2] It was made clear to him as never before that the only alternative to the World State was the War Path leading to the destruction of civili-

[1] *Supers and Supermen.*
[2] Atlantic Edition, Volume 19, Preface.

sation. He had long prophesied a European conflict as a danger without really believing in its likelihood; now that it had come he saw it as the consummation of an era of militarist imperialisms for which the Kaiser's theatrical instincts seemed mainly—or at any rate most evidently—responsible. It was time to extirpate militarism and imperialism for ever, to strangle the armament trade and recast the map of Europe along equitable lines. He honestly believed it could be done. The world was thrown into the melting-pot that it might be shaped anew. In that derided phrase which he seems to have invented, this was "the war to end war," and he was prepared almost to welcome it as such. "I believed that amidst the thunder of the guns the search for *Pax Mundi* must begin."[1] When the Hohenzollern was defeated, Europe would return to sanity, a World Peace Conference—in which America and other neutrals were to intervene as impartial judges—would see justice done, and then everything would be lovely in the garden of the World State for evermore. Revenge must be banished; the Allied quarrel was with the rulers of Germany, not its people, and peace must be concluded honourably as between democratic nations. Britain must emerge as clean-handed as it seemed to him she entered. The triumph of any imperialism—Allied no less than German—would mean that for him the war had been for nothing; he could not anticipate the day when we should all know that it *was* for nothing, and the bawling oafs of patriotic nationalisms would strut and swagger again not only in Europe, but even in that "incurably pacific" country, America.

It is, surely, only this preliminary identification of the German State with the War Path, the Allies with the World State, and the consequent sense of release in immediate purpose, which accounts for his artless acceptance of the popular views of Germany's aggression. But, having accepted, he could only take one course. He would sign none of the "Stop-the-War" appeals circulated by pacifist organisations,

[1] *Common Sense of World Peace.*

and like Mr. Britling he worked long into the night of that fateful Bank Holiday Monday on his first war article, *The Sword of Peace*. "Every sword that is drawn against Germany now," he summed up, "is a sword drawn for peace."

How completely he reflected in these early days the common feeling of Englishmen may be realised from *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*. It went beyond such minor recollected incidents as the family on August 4th gaily goose-stepping across the sunny rectory lawn, the eager waiting for war news day by day, the shelter given to homeless Belgians, the soldiers made comfortable in their billets in the barn, the vigorous protest against food-hoarding. He sought actively, in those first few weeks, some means of practical service; nobody, he said, "wants to be a non-combatant in a war of this sort." [1] He won derision from the superior intelligences of *Punch* by suggesting a form of universal volunteering not only to release the younger men for services abroad, but to crystallise that first outbreak of patriotism which through the inertia of officialdom so soon disintegrated. He was clearly apprehensive of a coastal landing and invasion, and repeatedly declared that if the War Office would not enroll and arm the older men as a volunteer corps for home defence, then the people of the threatened towns and villages would fight the Germans with whatever weapons were to hand. (The American papers joyfully announced: "Writer Wells Would Lynch Germans!")

His suggestions were coldly received, but he found another outlet for his energies. There was, even in these first months, a good deal of submerged agitation against the war, especially among the socialist leaders and the younger intellectuals. Not a few of the latter felt his attitude to be a betrayal for he, more than any other man, one of them has said, had by his distrust of capitalism and imperialism created the conscientious objector. He may not appreciate

[1] Letter, *Times*, August 8th, 1914.

or admit the claim—which does not invalidate it—but he felt the tendency, and being "greatly alarmed at the prospect of a pacifist stampede among the Liberals over here" he set all other work aside to do his best, "by articles and letters in the *Daily News,* the *Daily Chronicle,* the *Nation,* the *Labour Leader,* and elsewhere, to state the essentials of this conflict plainly." [1] These, as he conceived them in August 1914, when like most people he anticipated a swift melodramatic conflict and Germany's downfall "within the next two or three months," have already been summarised briefly. But with the autumn, as the thoroughness of the German organisation became clear, and the record, true and false, of atrocity and pillage grew steadily longer, the mood of optimism and generosity contracted. One or two of Wells's articles written that winter are worthy of Horatio Bottomley. He would approve annexations without limit; he would leave Germany without a single warship or colony; he would imprison the Kaiser and Crown Prince; he would loot Berlin; he would garrison the country with Allied troops; he would perpetually remind its people of their sins by stamping their railway tickets "Extra for Belgian Outrages—Two Marks," or, "Louvain—Two Marks." He even suggested the expropriation of all Allied art found in Germany, and denied merit to German literature on the ground that what was good in it had been written by Jews! Germany, he declared, *needed* humiliating.[2]

To this extravagance the stress of war could bring him, and the mood prevailed into 1915. It made him attack Shaw's comments on the war as "like an idiot child screaming in a hospital" [3]—not the least vituperative of the expressions he hurled at "the Terror of the Fabian Society" in a brief controversy. It says much for Shaw's amiability that their personal friendship continued uninterrupted. But he was, in point of fact, even when his feeling about the Germans

[1] Letter, *Nineteenth Century,* June 1915.
[2] *The Reckoning for the War.*
[3] *Muddleheadedness and Russia.*

had changed completely, never patient towards any form of pacifism so long as the war was in progress. Thus he wrote in 1916 of "the labour curs of the Clyde," and in 1917 swept aside the claims to a hearing of Bertrand Russell (another personal friend to this day) as one who "objected to Euclid upon grounds no one could possibly understand, in books no one could possibly read." [1] His attitude to conscientious objectors was one of scarcely concealed contempt. The only thing to be done about the war, he reiterated, was to end it for ever by crushing militarism in arms. Right up to the Peace Conference of 1919 he continued to see the Allies as standing bravely for World Peace, the Central Powers darkly for World Conquest.

It was his patriotism which led him astray as a war-prophet. He was too hopeful for his country. Continually he under-estimated the German power and resourcefulness; and as consistently over-estimated the intelligence of the British War Office and Staff. He was not prepared for the swift development of trench warfare, for the blunders of the Dardanelles, for the failure to seize command of the air, or, later, to use the tank effectively. In the beginning he had reckoned upon the theatrical instincts of the Kaiser to smash the German armies in a month. Before Britain had been at war a week he was pitying the enemy victims of "sham efficiency," supposedly dying in their thousands in dirt and blood in "the ditches of Liége and the gorges of the Ardennes." [2] By mid-August he saw that Germany had shot her bolt; the French would be over the Rhine before Christmas. Soon he became more cautious, but even into 1916 and 1917 succumbed too often to the temptation of proving that the war couldn't possibly last more than a few more months. He argued well, he proved it admirably. The only flaw was that the war went on. One prophetic exploit which for several years was frequently raised against him was his declaration in September 1916, that Germany and

[1] Introduction, *The Gods in the Battle.*
[2] *War that Will End War.*

her allies would capitulate by the following June. On this he was said to have staked his reputation as a prophet. The facts were that a vague suggestion of the date was wrung out of him by an obtrusive French journalist, a fellow-guest at a private dinner in Paris, and that, in consequence of the wide publicity the statement received, he wrote an article for an English newspaper justifying his forecast. By the end of the year he recognised that his hopes were no longer tenable—destroyed in particular by the "muffing" of the tanks—and expected a deadlock lasting into 1918 or 1919.[1]

He has summed up what the war actually meant to most men of his age and position as little more, after all, than "slightly dangerous but not uncomfortable visits to the front, an occasional stimulating air-raid," and "vivid news of victory or defeat, which only makes us brace ourselves up more bravely—to keep the Tommies at it."[2] He himself made one such visit to the French and Italian fronts, in 1916. He had been pressed to go in 1915, but evaded the suggestion; he didn't, for one thing, want to write "under instruction," and for another he feared a little to see some unexpected horror which might fling him off his balance into a simple unqualified hatred of all things German. He set out at last in August 1916 for Italy, but being held up in Paris was taken on a hasty trip to the French front at Soissons, and to the French Headquarters where he talked with Joffre. In Italy he made the usual round of the Isonzo and Trentino fronts—his account of the mountain warfare in the Dolomites is particularly vivid—and visited some of the towns behind the lines, familiar from many happy holidays. Near Udine he met the King of Italy. Back in France his guide to the trenches at Arras, Dompierre and Fricourt was the late Joseph Reinach, champion and historian of Dreyfus; from Amiens he was accompanied to the British front beyond Albert by the late C. E. Montague.

[1] See *Why the War Will be Over by June*, also *The Mystery of the Perennial Paragraph*.
[2] Preface, *The Somme*.

He recorded his impressions in *War and the Future*. In the following year he was invited by the Naval Censor, Rear Admiral Sir Douglas Brownrigg, to describe similarly the work of the Royal Naval Air Service, but he procrastinated, and other projects intervened. Earlier in 1917 he became a member of the Civil Air Transport Committee, where his insistence upon the impossibility of organising European air transport except on international lines gave him a model for the strenuous experiences of Sir Richmond Hardy on the Fuel Commission. He told a correspondent that summer: "I know those damned employers. I have got three of them on my Labour sub-committee. They are incapable of understanding that they are on the whole rather worse educated than their own young men employees with a much narrower outlook. It is the strain of being civil to them that has half broken me up." [1]

A considerable proportion of the work of the war years falls into the category of daily or weekly journalism which is written for the event and dies with it. He continued to produce books, and among them a number of novels, but all bear witness to the overwhelming preoccupation of the war. Essentially they too are journalism.

§ 2

It was mainly as a relief from the strain of the daily story of disaster and death that, unable to settle down to the sustained effort of completing *The Research Magnificent,* he took up, towards the end of 1914, the fragmentary matter of *Boon,* and prepared it for publication. He added *The Last Trump* as a pessimistic comment upon his own trust in the Mind of the Race and in *The Spoils of Mr. Blandish* rewrote in terms of Jamesian parody a short story of the *Pall Mall Gazette* days, *The Rajah's Treasure*. "Writing that stuff about you," he told Henry James a little later, "was the

[1] Letter to Mrs. I. M. Cowley.

first escape I had from the obsession of this war." When the book appeared in the following May, "prepared for publication by Reginald Bliss" but with a preface by Wells which left no doubt as to the real authorship, James was naturally distressed to find that art to which he had given his life pilloried and mocked by the one man whom for nearly twenty years he had admired above all others. The correspondence [1] which followed, pained on James's side, a little impatient on Wells's, is of interest as discussing what Wells in his answer to James's first letter termed "a real and very fundamental difference in our innate and developed attitudes towards life and literature. To you literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, it has a use. Your view was, I felt, altogether too prominent in the world of criticism and I assailed it in lines of harsh antagonism." James replied unhappily (he was evidently hurt as much in his affections as his pride) that he could scarcely believe his literary views to be a public menace; and he dissented from the distinction between literature *like* painting and literature *like* architecture. "There is no sense in which architecture is æsthetically 'for use' that doesn't leave any other art whatever exactly as much so; and so far from that of literature being irrelevant to the literary report upon life, and to its being made as interesting as possible, I regard it as relevant in a degree that leaves everything else behind. It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process." Wells concluded by admitting, as he was bound to, that he really didn't know what James was talking about: "When you say 'it is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance,' I can only read sense into it by assuming that you are using 'art' for every conscious human activity. I use the word for a research and attainment that is technical and special." In

[1] It may be studied in Volume II, pp. 503-8, of *The Letters of Henry James.*

1919, when the publication of these letters was in question, he told Arnold Bennett: "I wrote carelessly in that correspondence, feeling I was dealing with an old man and being only anxious to propitiate him—without too much waste of epistolary effort on my part.... I kept no copy of my letters and have never given the matter ten minutes thought since."

The issue is of course between the art which renders life and that which discusses it; finally and fundamentally it is a metaphysical issue. Most of us are all too entangled in living ever to look calmly and clearly at life; when we do look we see only those aspects which are in some way useful to us. But the artist looks at and sees the thing for its own sake, and by perceiving and depicting it newly intensifies our realisation of life, broadens our sympathies, and gives a truer sense of values. It is the essence of the Jamesian artistic attitude that an object should be seen for its own sake, not for its moral or social implications. The true artist sees a man in his humanity, not as a social unit, and his ultimate aim is no more than, in Conrad's phrase, "to make you see" with his own penetrating because disinterested vision. Wells has "rendered" life many times, yet the achievement seemingly has become more and more incidental; what has increasingly occupied him (so that his artistic achievement has been seen to become, after a point, progressively less) is not life but what may be done with life. He said frankly in 1917 in his introduction to Frank Swinnerton's *Nocturne*: "Personally I have no use at all for life as it is, except as raw material. It bores me to look at things unless there is also the idea of doing something with them.... It is always about life being altered that I write, or about people developing schemes for altering life. And I have never once 'presented' life. My apparently most objective books are criticisms and incitements to change."

§ 3

Mr. Britling Sees It Through is undoubtedly the outstanding example in Wells's work of the journalist turning artist in his own despite. It was conceived as a chronicle of contemporary thought and feeling, started early in 1915, and written almost daily during the following twelve months. The title itself witnesses its author's belief that the war would end within the year and that the book would tell its ending; it was retained in the face of facts because Wells "became accustomed" to it, and was shorn of its tail only in the Atlantic Edition. The story was founded mainly upon actual immediate experience (added to as the needs of the novelist directed), and became boldly photographic in much of its scenery and such minor characters as the German tutor, the country station-master, and some of the neighbours and hockey-visitors. Mr. Britling's feelings about the war and in general are indistinguishable from those expressed by Wells in his own person. But journalism in this case was transfigured by the pen of a great writer. The tragic emotions of a vast event brought this account of what the coming of war meant to one Englishman as near to greatness in its deep humanity as any book of the period. Wells in those early days had rediscovered his deep love for his native land, and in writing *Mr. Britling* he expressed a nation's feeling as Shaw, for example, never has and never will. So the book became a very true and very moving record of the experience of countless English men and women in 1914 and 1915, and as such I think it will stand permanently. It has humour, masterly characterisation, a fine handling of incident and emotion; it is a tender and beautiful book.

It sold tremendously; it was so widely read that even clergymen preaching in their churches could assume the majority of their listeners would know it. It brought Wells a considerable correspondence, and in particular a rush of sympathy for his loss of a quite imaginary eldest son. He

replied to one such letter: "I have no sons in the War; my eldest boy is fifteen, but I have seen the tragedy of my friends' sons—many young men friends.... I do feel that we owe a kind of altar to all these splendid youths, on which we may offer social service in a great effort to secure the peace of the world. I think for very many years life will now be mainly *world making* (or world mending). If the next ten years are not pitifully disastrous years they may be the greatest years in history." [1]

But what he immediately wanted was less an altar than a pulpit from which to preach, in the name of a generation's sacrifice, the coming of the World State under the kingship of the One True God. Its literary and historical values apart, *Mr. Britling* is mainly interesting as tracing the first movement of his mind towards the consolations and pitfalls of theology. This is the phase in Wells's development—though in fact it was less a phase than an interlude—for which I have least sympathy and understanding, and I do not propose or think it necessary to deal with it at length. It was for Wells, as for Britling, a direct consequence of the war. At the front sensitive men (some of them) took to drink; at home sensitive men (some of them) took to religion. Living became impossible without some drug, some refuge, some support against the insanity of the world. Wells had to make an affirmation of positive belief in purpose lest he should fall into an abyss of despair. The Finite God of *Mr. Britling, War and the Future, God the Invisible King,* and *The Soul of a Bishop* was such an affirmation, a highly emotionalised objectification of a personal necessity. He has since said that in *God the Invisible King* he "personified and emotionalised to his utmost," [2] but at the time he sought repeatedly to make it clear that the book was neither metaphor nor theory but a "forcible and exact record of fact." Actually he produced no better argument or evidence for this finite Captain of Mankind,

[1] Letter to William Farren.
[2] Atlantic Edition, Volume 11, Preface.

who "fights through men against Blind Force and Night and Non-Existence" to "unify and save mankind," than that it is expedient to believe—as much as anything to be saved from priggishness. Priggishness, he wrote in the 1917 revised edition of *First and Last Things,* derives from the failure "to realise that the impulse to serve mankind comes from a source outside of and greater than one's individual good intentions." But indeed he was never so near priggishness as in these books which announce his certain possession of unassailable knowledge. Dogmatism is the ultimate priggishness.

The Soul of a Bishop, written in late 1916 and early 1917, immediately following *God the Invisible King,* is the story of an ecclesiastic's discovery of the new God. It is Wells's least interesting, least vital, and most humourless novel, and the Bishop and Lady Sunderbund are his dreariest characterisations.

Yet if this God was primarily and mainly emotional, Wells was also continuing a line of thought he had been developing for some years past, notably since the writing of *The New Machiavelli* in 1909-1910, and *The Mind of the Race* in 1911. *God the Invisible King* was in effect—though Wells in 1917 would not admit it—the Mind of the Race, the collective consciousness of mankind, in theological costume. That Mind, that collective consciousness, had grown increasingly objective, moving more and more towards personification, in the immediately pre-war novels. Now, under necessity, he made the ultimate identification. He soon realised that it would not work—that it was only a makeshift set up to conceal a void—and more practicable suggestions took the centre of the stage. The essential idea remained; the emotion and the theological colouring faded. They are fading even in *Joan and Peter,* and in *The Undying Fire* God, so far as he is more than a personification of the collective consciousness, is purely dramatic; to compare the latter work with *The Soul of a Bishop* is to realise what a fine, stark, clear-minded book it

is. Thenceforward God recedes farther and farther, until in 1930 Wells apologetically defends his presentation of the creative human will in the guise of "a youthful and adventurous finite God" as indeed no sin but merely "an error in translation." [1]

Upon publication *God the Invisible King* caused some controversy, indeed "voluminous discussion." Wells told a correspondent: "I do not believe that the religion taught by Jesus was what I attack as 'Christianity.' I believe he taught *the Kingdom of God*. But I did not say so, and I wilfully tweaked the noses and pulled the ears and generally insulted 'Christians' in order to wake them up to an examination of their religion. I'm not founding a 'New Religion' or looking for adherents. I'm simply a fragment of intellectual ferment. *God the Invisible King* (the book) will be forgotten in a score of years. The idea of God the Invisible King will be dominating hundreds of thousands of minds." [2] He wrote about this time to J. V. Milne in the same connection: "There are two sorts of prayer. There is magic prayer, which is supposed to alter things, like prayers for rain and the behaviour of distant people. I class that with Christian Science and witchcraft and I don't argue about it. There is also the prayer that is a regulation of the heart and mind. That is undoubtedly a good thing, but it would take me a long time and need very careful writing to state my views about that." And again: "You say something odd about personal immortality being necessary to religion. Surely the one essential thing in any religion that matters is not to keep but to get rid of the self!" A later note to Arnold Bennett (1929) is interesting as illustrating his typically combative opposition to Christian quietism: "I liked *The Religious Interregnum* because it is you, but I don't agree for a moment about the ethics of Jesus. I don't believe in non-resistance and I find the whole code unstimulating and inconsistent. Ethics of meek manners and eco-

[1] *Open Conspiracy*, Revised Edition.
[2] Letter to James Bernard.

nomic inactivity (consider the lilies) with the smug satisfaction of knowing what happened to Dives in the back of one's mind. No. Give me magnanimity but not non-resistance to evil."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE COSMOPOLITAN

§ 1

FROM the beginning of the war Wells was looking to its ending, but it was in particular from 1916 forward that he continually urged the need for concentration upon post-war problems of reconstruction. In May 1916 he attended a gathering of members of the British Science Guild, summoned by Sir Ray Lankester at Burlington House, to protest against the prevailing neglect of science in British education, industry, and warfare alike. For Wells the meeting was memorable mainly as beginning an intimacy with the late Sir Harry Johnston, but his interest in the subject, and his investigations as a member of the Committee on the Neglect of Science, made him address to the *Times* in the following July and August six letters on questions of science, education, and industry. They were printed over the initials "D. P.," and subsequently issued anonymously in book form as *The Elements of Reconstruction,* an attempt perhaps to gain an unprejudiced hearing from many readers opposed to his known views. (The series appeared as the work of "two friends" but in fact Wells was the sole author, as was acknowledged in the third edition.) Certainly concessions were made to British opinion, imperial considerations displacing his usual theme of a Peace League of Allies consciously conceived as a step towards the World State. He accepted the Empire as a working unit; it must, he insisted, plan for the future as such—or fail. His thesis was the importance of scale in industry in order to make full use of

scientific research, and economic syndicates of imperial extent were suggested. It was indeed what is now called rationalisation carried out to its logical conclusion. He urged, in effect, socialism by amalgamation, and argued that this implied sweeping reforms of the governmental machine and a higher standard of education. The alternative was economic inadequacy, with Capital and Labour eventually setting aside the fading ghost of parliamentary authority to take power progressively into their own hands.

The book marks Wells's clearly growing conviction, which began about this time to find expression in articles and speeches, of the urgent need for better education. His interest in education had been, of course, primary and continuous since his own teaching days; it appears in many of his books. But the war illuminated the subject anew. Science in the last hundred years had given men an almost illimitable power; what now appeared was their inability to control it. It was as though a stumbling child had gained possession of a high explosive. Wells perceived that in their lack of knowledge, understanding and restraint, in their incapacity to see beyond the event to the inevitable consequence, and to weigh one against the other, men *were* just that—stumbling children in imminent danger of self-destruction. Life was suddenly realised as "a race between education and catastrophe," with catastrophe an all too likely winner.

He was confirmed and sustained in this view by his friendship with the late F. W. Sanderson, whom he met in 1914 and has described as "beyond question the greatest man I have ever known with any degree of intimacy." [1] During the whole period of their contact Sanderson was headmaster of Oundle School, where Wells's two sons were educated, and which, or a reflection of which, appears in *Joan and Peter* as Caxton. They had many ideas in common, but especially the view of education as teaching the individual in the light of modern knowledge, his place in time and

[1] *Story of a Great Schoolmaster.*

space and his function in the world of his future activity, and sending him forth imbued with the creative spirit of co-operation. Both opposed the classical system of education because they felt it to be, in the world of today, inadequate to and an evasion of such a task. But Wells went beyond Sanderson. In the days of *Mankind in the Making* he had manifestly conceived education as the training of a mind for free individual functioning; primarily it "trained," only secondarily it "shaped." Now shaping was primary; he wanted to make, as in a mould, World State citizens. He had come to the conclusion that "the general business of life is the development of a collective consciousness and will and purpose, out of a chaos of individual consciousnesses and wills and purposes," and he wanted to subordinate education to that as completely and ruthlessly as any other man with a fixed purpose. The change is admirably analysed by Mr. F. H. Doughty in his capable book *H. G. Wells: Educationist.* "The contrast," he sums up, "is mainly that contrast between the artist with a keen eye for the infinite complexity of life and for the significance of individuality, and the scientific investigator who deprecates the tragic wastefulness due to the dreadful casualness of human progress, and who longs to take it all in hand and tidy it up."

This later attitude to education may be said to underlie all Wells's work since 1916. It is invariably implicit, and often plainly dominant. He may seem to turn at times from the school towards some more immediate instrument, but in the League of Nations Union and even as Parliamentary candidate he constantly urged the basic importance of education. The novels, from *Joan and Peter* and *The Undying Fire* onward, insist upon it. The relevance of *The Outline of History, The Science of Life,* and the projected *Science of Work and Wealth,* is obvious; he frankly declares them "an attempt to pioneer the way single-handed to the new education, the organised ideology, that is to say, of a cosmopolitan socialism." Mr. Doughty, with a full sense of Wells's importance as a critic of education, regarded *The*

Outline of History as "likely to prove his most pregnant contribution to educational thought"; he was writing, of course, before the announcement of its companion works.

Joan and Peter, written in 1917 and 1918 as a review of "the possibilities of a liberal education in contemporary England and to reflect upon the types of educated youngster that the period round and about the War years was giving the British world," [1] shows the educationist in the ascendant, the novelist receding. It is largely planned, but ill balanced; despite some admirable descriptive writing and attractive characters (Wells regards Joan as his best heroine) it has no artistic form—its unity is purely ideological. It has much to say, and it says it at merciless length, wandering through infancy, preparatory school, and university, and concluding with an account of England at war, the spirit of which, more dogged perhaps but certainly wearier, makes an instructive contrast to *Mr. Britling.* Even so the book is incomplete; Wells had to omit, in view of its inordinate length—it is very little shorter than *The World of William Clissold* —"an adequate discussion" of Peter's Caxton schooling.

Early in 1917 he demonstrated that he was no convert to imperialism, despite *The Elements of Reconstruction,* by writing for the London Press a series of articles making clear the necessary sacrifices of British prejudices involved by the League of Nations idea, which had recently been brought into the sphere of practical politics by the impressive declarations of President Wilson. The best of this matter is reprinted as *In the Fourth Year.* Wells conceived a League genuinely controlling all armed forces, to be, in fact, public trustee for the world. Inevitably it would supersede the British Empire, and he urged his countrymen to face and accept the fact. A letter on this point was rejected by the *Times* in May 1917 as "altogether too revolutionary," but so rapidly did public opinion change during this critical year that in December he was writing on the subject in the *Daily Mail* at the editor's invitation. His familiar case

[1] Atlantic Edition, Volume 23, Preface.

was that world economic unity brought about by modern transport conditions made the League the only peaceful alternative to a single overbearing imperialism. The League was the Allied choice; imperialism the German. He saw the League as growing naturally out of the Peace Conference, and as he wanted both to be representative of the peoples—not merely the governments—of the countries concerned, he suggested the election of special delegates for that purpose. Everywhere he saw the longing for peace stifled by the blind conservatism of Foreign Offices and political partisans. If democracy were to express its will, there must be electoral reform. So he took up again for a season the propaganda of Proportional Representation. He wrote to Simmons: "I mean to make every man who opposes P.R. ashamed—just as though he had been caught eating peas with his knife. You can't go soft with men who don't mean the right thing and they are much more amenable to good square trouncing than they are to hinting criticisms. Can't you do something to make the P.R. question *tell* in the London University election? . . . I ought to be put up for the London University."

He also followed Wilson in urging the official declaration of Allied war-aims, and this was one of the first points he brought forward when, early in 1918, at Lord Northcliffe's invitation, he joined the Enemy Propaganda Committee established at Crewe House. At the beginning of May he became first director of propaganda policy against Germany, and wrote, and presented on May 27th, a *Memorandum on Peace Propaganda* which was approved by the Government and used as the basis of a campaign of promises by which, in the words of Wells's bitter comment, Germany was bilked into an armistice that placed her, without better security than English good faith, at the feet of her enemies."[1] The memorandum repeated his plea for a statement of Allied war-aims, rejecting predatory annexations, and adumbrating a powerful League of Nations into which

[1] *What Is Success?*

Germany, freed from the imperialist incubus, might enter on equal terms with the other great nations. Following the war whole-hearted German co-operation in an international scheme of disarmament and reconstruction was essential to Europe's economic recovery, and since such partnership could not be expected from the militarist Germany of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1917, the basic propagandist aim must be "the changing of Germany." Actual revolution was deprecated (half-heartedly), but a constant appeal urged "from Germany junker to Germany sober"—to the people of Germany as against their autocratic rulers.

For more than a month Wells went on with his work, gathering valuable information and getting into touch with organisations working to rouse public opinion at home and abroad to acceptance of the League idea. With Wickham Steed he drew up a restatement of the aims of the League of Nations Society (founded in 1915), and in July launched a new League of Free Nations Association in which Gilbert Murray, J. A. Spender, J. H. Thomas, J. L. Garvin and C. A. McCurdy were prime movers. He also did preparatory work upon a summary of British Labour War Aims, issued later.

Then came dissension. Wells quarrelled with Northcliffe. The latter's newspapers, and in particular the *Evening News,* were carrying on a virulent anti-German campaign which Wells saw as altogether contrary to the work of the Propaganda Committee. He told Northcliffe that he must "control his own papers and stop this mischievous foolery." [1] Northcliffe refused. As Director of Propaganda he was willing to promise whatever would bring Germany to surrender. As newspaper proprietor he was going to give his public what it wanted. He defended himself by saying that the British fighting spirit must be maintained. To Wells such a double-faced attitude appeared outrageous, and he resigned his directorship in mid-July.

He continued his work for the League of Free Nations

[1] *What Is Success?*

Association. In September he placed *In the Fourth Year* at its free disposal, and in November ten thousand copies of an abbreviated version were issued as *Anticipations of a World Peace*. In November, too, the already numerically stronger Association and the senior League of Nations Society agreed to terminate their Tweedledum and Tweedledee existence as confusing to the public—their differences of policy were indeed negligible—and following a triumphantly successful meeting in London merged as the League of Nations Union. Wells was a member of the first Executive and Research Committees of the Association and Union, and the influence of his distinctive views is apparent in many of the early publications, including those which were anonymous. In January 1919, however, he resigned his chairmanship of the Research Committee on grounds of ill-health, and before the end of the year had severed the connection completely by walking angrily out from a meeting and slamming the door behind him. (Later he became "one of the most valuable and respected members of our Dunmow branch," but that is another matter.)

§ 2

Yet brief as was his connection with the Union, it had one important consequence. He found his colleagues in this work for world peace and world unity possessed of the most discordant conceptions possible of the significance of nationality, and was forced to realise vividly the completeness with which a man's outlook is shaped by his historical ideas, and how inevitably narrowing is the effect of a nationalist teaching which isolated one's country as different from and superior to the rest of the world. His conclusion was that a League of Nations leading to a World State could grow to reality only out of a soil of world history. He had long been attracted—the very conception of the Mind of the Race implies it—by the idea that "History is one, just

as Chemistry is one, a story that has to be told as a whole before it can be dealt with in parts."[1] He had imagined such a world history while still at South Kensington; he had sketched its main outlines for his growing sons; and in more than one novel and essay he had memorably described the development of man as one species arising from a common origin and moving towards a common destiny. "There can be no common peace and prosperity without common historical ideas. Without such ideas to hold them together in harmonious co-operation, with nothing but narrow, selfish, and conflicting nationalist traditions, races and people are bound to drift towards conflict and destruction."[2] The idea was not new—Kant had preached it—but it had never been acted on effectively. Now the need was urgent. Wells went about among his colleagues suggesting that one of them should produce a world history which would afford a coherent progressive account of "mental synthesis and material co-operation, from the completely isolated individual life and death of the primordial animal to the continuing mental life and the social organisation now growing to planetary dimensions, of the human species."[3] He found them sceptical, not of the need for it, but of the possibility of concentrating so much material within the scope of scholastic capacities. So strongly and consistently was this objection raised, that the only answer seemed to be to compile a manageable account himself. So he decided to write *The Outline of History*.

He embarked upon the task towards the autumn of 1918, and for nearly three years history was his principal study. *The Undying Fire,* written near the beginning of this period, and *The Secret Places of the Heart,* written near the end, are both, as Wells says of the latter, "saturated with the historical idea."[4] He links them with the earlier *Soul of a Bishop* as experiments in the dialogue novel; of the

[1] Letter to Sir Denison Ross.
[2] Introduction, *Outline of History*.
[3] *New Teaching of History*.
[4] Atlantic Edition, Volume 25, Preface.

three *The Undying Fire* is certainly the most successful. It is the testament of a modern Job who looks at past and present, indicts the foulness and cruelty of life in passages of memorable force, and still will not deny a growing goodness and good will in humanity which he names God. It is one of the very best of all the later novels, having a concentration lacking in most of its fellows, and the Prologue in Heaven has the unforced imaginative control of the earlier short stories. *The Secret Places of the Heart* does not lack good dialogue, but it has too much that is less than good; as discussion it wanders about the point instead of going straight to it, and the author treats the romantic renunciations of Sir Richard and V.V. with a gravity few readers can share.

The preparation for and writing of the *Outline* was necessarily a terrific labour, and it seems almost incredible that after a little over a year of what even Wells himself described as "fanatical toil" it should have been ready in November 1919 to run the gauntlet of publication in parts. It was mainly pioneering work, a breaking of new ground. Admittedly it had certain academic forerunners in America, but essentially this had to be a plain account for the ordinary reader—the ordinary teacher or pupil even—and as such very simple, clear and accurate. He had as editorial helpers his two friends Sir Ray Lankester and Sir Harry Johnston, and two colleagues from the League of Nations Union Research Committee, Gilbert Murray and Ernest Barker; further, he laid under tribute the expert knowledge of many historical specialists. These guided him in his reading, checked his statements, and made useful suggestions, but the writing was altogether his, and he had in everything the final word and the final responsibility. A letter to Sir Denison Ross, written in May 1919, illustrates his manner of approaching an individual period or problem: "I won't bother you with any particulars about the difficulty of getting the Ichthyosaurus, Julius Cæsar, the Neanderthal Man, Buddha and General French into one picture on something

like the proper scale. One thing that does come out very surely and which does—if you will let it—concern you is the vast importance of Central Asia and China in the story, and the huge blank there is in our contemporary historical imagination in that respect. We get—I fear—the Roman Empire perpetually out of drawing. It is only now that I begin to realise that the Tarim valley is of more importance than Jordan or the Rhine. But I find a lot of difficulty in getting any reasonable predigested sources for such a big sketch of the whole of history as I am doing. I can't find a good general history of China at all and I have to patch together odd scraps of stuff from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and elsewhere to get the story of Central Asia and the European steppes between Herodotus and 1200 A.D. I wish I could tap your knowledge in the matter by half an hour's talk. Could I see you? If so, I should be very glad." He would write a chapter, send copies to as many authorities as could be implicated, rewrite in the light of their comments, and finally submit proofs to the advisors principally concerned. The total labour involved, of reading, assimilating, sorting, synthesising, writing, checking, and rewriting, was positively enormous, and meant for both Wells and Mrs. Wells months of unceasing application day after day and often far into the night.

The result, upon publication, was unexpected. The book was aimed at the English educational world. Outside that narrow sphere Wells anticipated little sale, but he did hope definitely to influence the actual teaching of history in schools and colleges. Instead, the latter went on their way sublimely disregarding its existence—they do so to this day —while the public bought it by the hundred thousand. Wells says: "One went to bed educational reformer and woke up to find oneself best seller." The first serial issue sold more than a hundred thousand copies of each part; in 1920 two book editions appeared successfully, a quarter of a million copies being sold in America; a definitive edition was published in 1923; and in 1925 and 1926, further re-

vised and with the addition of sections on art and literature, it was issued for the second time in fortnightly parts and again in book form. In America a dollar edition sold 350,000 copies in 1930; a cheap edition also appeared in England in September of the same year. It has been translated into many languages, and altogether more than a million and a half people have actually bought it. In 1921 and 1922 he wrote *A Short History of the World* especially for "the busy general readers who lacked time for the longer *Outline*," and this too has sold well in numerous editions. Incidentally, this excursion into history made Wells a rich man on an altogether new and unexpected scale.

Each successive printing embodied revision, a combing out of errors, a general amendment of disputed statements. Wells has always regarded it as a provisional account, to stand only until the production of a more competent work covering the same ground, but it is in fact too individual ever to be entirely superseded, essentially Wellsian in the bold imaginative sweep of its generalisations, its brilliant evocation of detail, its eloquent prose, its occasional harsh antipathies. Inevitably it was extensively criticised upon each publication, especially by classicists and Catholics, and in *The New Teaching of History* Wells exhibited some of the more considerable of these commentators as typical of various aspects of traditional mentality. Belloc, voluble, pedantic, and extraordinarily illiberal, took his revenge at the greatest possible length upon the second serial publication by writing a critical *Companion* to the *Outline*. The controversy that followed was occasionally amusing, but too much resembled the conflict between immovable object and irresistible force to have much value.

§ 3

The immediately post-war years brought a change in Wells's outlook, as in that of all the world. For liberal thought everywhere 1919 proved a year of tragic disillusion. The

spirit of grab prevailed. Reconstruction became a word with which to dazzle fools while the canny men picked their pockets. At Versailles Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Orlando met to bluff and baffle Wilson (that innocent abroad whom Clemenceau dismissed as "talking like Jesus Christ") into a betrayal of Germany beside which the invasion of Belgium had the importance of a pet dog's death in a railway disaster. Against his shadowy hopes for the future they set the concrete hatreds of the past, and they scored point after point. The Peace Conference was revealed as that "old-fashioned diplomatic conspiracy" Wells had feared, the League as no more than "a league of Allied imperialisms" from which the Central Powers and Russia were excluded, and into which America refused to enter. Junkerdom rose like a phœnix from its victims' smoking ashes to reappear triumphant in Ireland, Egypt, and at Amritsar in India. It became evident not only to Wells but to scores of millions that the war indeed "ended nothing, began nothing, and settled nothing." [1]

By 1920 he had adopted that antagonism to the League which informs all his subsequent references to it. In its absolute lack of power it seemed to him no more than an obstacle to world peace, a diplomat's device for shelving every constructive proposal. Its very name was wrong; one wanted not a League of Nations, but a League to Suppress Nationalism. The League stood for nationalism, he for the World State; "World State or World Smash" has been from first to last his post-war slogan, and though one might on some grounds deprecate his open expressions of hostility, one cannot, in view of what the League has actually accomplished and failed to accomplish, accuse him of inconsistency.

There followed years of evident indecision which did nothing to mitigate his hostility. He feared an economic breakdown in Europe, even perhaps a breakdown of civilisation everywhere. He continued month in and

[1] *Short History.*

month out to press the educational necessity as the "initial and decisive factor in the future of mankind," but he cast about too for some more immediately effective lever lest education itself should collapse into the gulf. This apprehension, uncomfortably deepened by his Russian trip in 1920, made him agree to an American lecture tour and dictated the matter and spirit of the lectures he wrote for transatlantic delivery. It made him attend the Washington Conference, and welcome President Harding's proposal of an Association of Nations as loudly and insistently as possible from the pulpit of the World's press. It made him accept every opportunity of journalistic publicity for his World State gospel. It brought him to an open stand for birth control as a primary issue. It made him join the Labour Party as alone in politics possessing creative will, made him stand for Parliament as its candidate, and then in 1924, when it exhibited its quality in office, made him as hastily drop it again.

He went to Russia with his eldest son, who spoke the language, towards the end of September 1920, at the invitation of the Russian Trade Delegation in London. Most of their fifteen days in the country they spent in Petersburg with Maxim Gorki, wandering freely about the city with a friend of the 1914 visit for guide and interpreter. On October 7th Wells addressed the Petersburg Soviet in that same hall where he had attended a session of the old Duma. In addition to Gorki, he met Pavlov, Glazounov, and Chaliapin, and among the Bolshevists Lenin, Zinovieff, Tchitcherin, and Zorin. For the meeting with Lenin he journeyed specially to Moscow. Their brief encounter was interesting but no more. Wells asked critical questions, and particularly what was to be done about the peasant and peasant mentality. The Five Year Plan was foreshadowed in that talk, but Lenin's idea was not of a general Five Year Plan for all Russia but of a progressive expropriation, province by province. Lenin—small, amiable, alert—brushed aside his visitor's criticisms of Bolshevism to discourse, not

very convincingly, upon his own schemes for the electrification of Russia. They "parted warmly," but Wells's mainly favourable impression was evidently not shared by Lenin, for the latter, according to Trotsky, exclaimed vehemently when describing the talk: "What a bourgeois he is! He is a philistine! Ah, what a philistine!"[1] Wells had been an outspoken critic of the Bolshevists since 1917, but he returned convinced that they represented the one constructive party in Russia. Much more, however, was he impressed by the sheer spectacle of a civilisation in decay. He could not forget Petersburg's desolate streets and crumbling houses, peopled now over large areas only by occasional wary figures . . . and the ghosts of the populous thousands of 1914. He envisioned a Russian collapse which might drag all Europe with it back into "peasant barbarism."

Even before he set out for Russia he was assailed in the London papers as pro-Bolshevist by the late Henry Arthur Jones, who had already in 1919 attacked him in a pamphlet—*Patriotism and Popular Education*. Jones had notified Wells then of the appearance of his essay, and Wells had replied that nothing would alter his kindly feelings towards Jones: "I've no doubt you'll go for me with the utmost spirit and violence and fairness. I think the British Empire in its present form a sham and a nuisance." But now Jones went altogether beyond simple hard-hitting, and on the eve of leaving England Wells wrote to a paper which was printing the letters: "I'm up to my neck in work for the trip and I shall be out of England on Monday, so that it's a particularly inconvenient time to have Jones barking at me in this way. I wish you could hold his eloquence out for a day or so anyhow. On the whole I'd better not answer him at all if there is to be a wrangle. He will be left spouting triumphantly while I am spouting to less effect on the North Sea. I wanted an understanding with the Bolshevists in 1918. It would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives and by now

[1] *Lenin.*

Russia would have been a civilised country again with the Bolshevists two years out of date."

On the serial and book publication of *Russia in the Shadows* Jones continued to shriek and splutter throughout the autumn and winter, Wells answering irritably. He was not polite, but he was pointed, whereas Jones was neither. Wells was also involved in a Russian controversy with Churchill, more notable for its personalities than its pertinence.

Partly, at least, his impatience and irritability arose from a struggle against time and illness. All that autumn he was hard at work on a series of lectures which, in view of what he felt to be the urgency of his World State message, he had after several previous refusals agreed to deliver in America in the following December and January. He intended to put before his audience with the utmost vividness a vision of a European collapse, inevitable if some radical adjustment were not effected, and to urge the idea of working directly for the World State as altogether more hopeful than any project to reform the League of Nations. From this he would pass to the importance of education in the creation of a World State mentality and will. He would suggest, speculatively, as sixteen years earlier in *A Modern Utopia,* a "New Bible" to provide outlines of world history, world science, and world wisdom, and to "form the basis and framework for the thought and imagination of every citizen in the world." [1] Finally, he would suggest the need and possibility of raising the standard of education all the world over by releasing learning from "its old servitude to place and to time" and his old foes the universities. The modern university, he agrees with Carlyle, is a library. (More recently he wrote to an inquirer in America, Mr. R. Critchell Rimington: "For the ordinary type of student the four years of college are wasted. The time must come when Oxford and

[1] But in 1921 he told Dr. Marie Stopes: "I'm glad you're doing a Bible. Don't call it a Bible—that arouses a lot of needless prejudice, I've found out, and much foolishness. Call it *Everybody's Book* and pretend it isn't anything very much but a useful handbook of conduct and general ideas."

Cambridge, Yale and Harvard, will stand empty and clean for the amateur of architecture and the sightseeing tourist. The place for learning to do a thing is the place where the thing is done, and the place for a general education under modern circumstances is everywhere.")

But the lectures were never delivered, for in November, three weeks before sailing, a cold caught in Russia and never shaken off turned to congestion of the lungs. The manuscript went instead to a publisher to appear as that unsatisfactory volume, *The Salvaging of Civilization,* while he convalesced in the sunshine of Amalfi, in Southern Italy on the Gulf of Palermo. He wrote to Arnold Bennett from Paris: "I'm *en route* for Rome and so far I've done very well —a beautiful crossing and Paris like summer. I think I shall get through to Amalfi all right.... I can't help thinking of your motherly impulse in writing to me. It showed a kindness and concern. And generally the dear old Reform has been like a band of elder brothers over my temporary hygienic indiscretions. I'm really going to do nothing unpleasant or laborious for two good months or more. Then I will come back and be a credit to you." His absence prevented him from seeing either rehearsals or any performance of the modernised dramatic version of *The Wonderful Visit,* written by St. John Ervine with his connivance, and produced at the St. Martin's Theatre in February 1921. While abroad he wrote his pamphlet *The New Teaching of History,* returning to complete *The Secret Places of the Heart* and to set to work on *A Short History of the World.*

Towards the end of 1921 he accepted the invitation of the *New York World* to attend the Washington Conference as its special correspondent, and arrangements were made to syndicate his daily articles the world over, the *Daily Mail* buying the exclusive rights for Britain. Naturally he used the occasion to disseminate once more his message of a World at Peace which now had grown so imminent in his imagination "that I must needs go about this present world of disorder and darkness like an exile doing such feeble

things as I can towards the world of my desire, now hopefully, now bitterly, as the moods may happen, until I die." [1] From the first the conditions of the Conference—the exclusion of Germany and Russia, the aloofness of the French, the general atmosphere of social frivolity—seemed to him ominous. And as he watched he saw what were then his last hopes of world peace slaughtered in a diplomatic "haggle for advantages." Today it seems ironical that he should have looked so confidently to President Harding—that eminent poker player who gave to his devoted "pals" so lavishly of all that was not his—as the one saving figure of the Conference.

He was particularly outspoken in attacking the self-righteous determination of the French to grab all and give nothing, and on Lord Northcliffe's instructions the *Daily Mail* suppressed first the more caustic references and finally one complete article. Agitated cablegrams passed to and fro between Carmelite House and Washington, and then the *New York World* intervened to snub the *Daily Mail* for trying to dictate to a member of the American paper's staff. Lord Beaverbrook, mindful that the serialisation of Wells's Russian articles had increased the circulation of the *Sunday Express* by 80,000 copies weekly, also stepped in, and the *Daily Express* took over publication in a mood of self-congratulation. At the end of the series, still patting itself on the back, it professed to find in the later articles "faint but unmistakable" signs that Wells was tending towards imperialism. Some one must have been studying a misprint through a microscope.

Just at this time an interviewer asked Anatole France his opinion of Wells. He replied: *"Il est le plus intelligent des Anglais!"* The interviewer protested. Had not M. France read Wells's attacks on the French? Anatole France made no reply; he would not qualify his dictum.[2]

[1] *Washington and the Hope of Peace.*
[2] *John o' London's Weekly*, January 21st, 1922.

§ 4

For many years—one might say always—Wells had been chary of allying himself to the partial panaceas of any political group. He had long ago rejected the simple opposition of Capital and Labour. His just after the war views were clearly expressed in a letter to Sir Richard Gregory in May 1921, in declining an invitation to take the chair for an address on Science and Labour: "I wish I could make speeches and join you in your visit to the Portsmouth Brotherhood. If I did I should probably spend most of the time they would give me in saying that Science *will endure and rule,* but that Labour with a capital L, as the name of a class of human beings organised for distinctive class ends, *will pass away*. I am at one with Soddy in believing that if the spirit of Science is carried right through human affairs, it means a complete organisation of human society for all common ends, educational and economic, and a common general administration of the whole world and all its resources. In an organised world there will be no organised labour, as such, because every one will play his or her part in the common task and no one will toil, and there will be no capitalists, because capital, the accumulated resources of mankind, will be administered for the common good. Or if you like to put it in another way, Humanity will be one labour organisation and the only capitalist in the world. In such a state questions of wages and dividends disappear. They will give place to the question of the 'fair share.' Of everyone we shall ask what is the fair share of effort he or she shall contribute to the commonweal and what is the fair share of consumable goods he shall take from the commonweal? The amount of the fair share in each case depends entirely upon the applied science in the world. The more we know, the more developed our science, and in science I include not merely physical and biological science but psychological and educational science, the greater the common

product we shall share and the less the exertion needed to produce it. I think the future welfare of mankind depends not at all upon whether labour beats the private capitalist or whether private capitalists get what they think is the better of labour, but upon the supersession of private ownership in economic affairs and of the methods of bargaining and of employment and unemployment, by the infinitely less clumsy ways of co-operation that the social, educational, and physical sciences as they develop will render not merely possible but imperative."

But by 1922 the Labour Party—which since 1918 he had been regarding more and more sympathetically as Britain's last political hope—seemed to him to have risen altogether above its original limitations of working-class representation; he saw it as standing "for all the creative work in the State," and as the only party with any positive remedy at all, educational or other, for "this progressive break-up of civilised organisation that is going on." He became a member, and in May, accepting the Labour candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University (his opponents were Lord Birkenhead, who was elected, and Sir John Simon), he declared the serious possibility of ceasing to produce fiction in order to give all his time to political writing in the Labour interest. In July he agreed to contest London University at the next Parliamentary election. This came in November. The seat was won by the Conservative candidate, Sir Sidney Russell Wells, Professor A. F. Pollard (Liberal) being second, and H. G. well at the bottom of the poll with less than a fifth of the total number of votes recorded. In 1923 they stood again with identical results, but with the advent of a Labour Government to office he felt that his part was played. He hadn't, the truth was, wanted election at all, and stood only for propagandist purposes, knowing that his speeches—in which he consequently sought to state the fundamental principles of the Party as clearly and simply as possible—would be widely reported

and read not because he was a candidate but because he was Wells.

His decision not to stand again was made at once, but had it not been he could scarcely have delayed long, for the Labour Government lost no time in proving itself to be in the true Parliamentary tradition. Not a few of the series of weekly articles he wrote in 1923 and 1924 for the McClure Newspaper Syndicate (reprinted in *A Year of Prophesying*) criticised its lack of initiative with a frankness which would have left him little ground for a continued support. He remains a member to this day, but for all practical purposes he abandoned it in 1924 as lacking initiative, and his later references are altogether critical.

He accused it among other matters of burking, for fear of the Catholic vote, the important issue of birth control, which for thirty years he has regarded as a condition of Utopia, and since the war has come to see as urgently necessary. He wrote to Dr. Stopes in 1921: "I'm really very keen on the birth control work you are doing. It lies at the very root of a better civilisation." William Clissold makes it his test of orthodoxy between liberalism and reaction, the symbol of man's conscious control of his destiny, and absolutely essential to a happy and peaceful world: "I cannot conceive a world republic existing and continuing unless that automatic increase of population which follows every increment in the food supply is restrained, and it can only be restrained by a world-wide knowledge and universal acceptability of the methods and means of birth control." That this is Wells's own view is clear from many references in his other writings, especially the introduction to *The Pivot of Civilisation* by Margaret Sanger.

Despite his suggestion of abandoning fiction, he had not done so, and from 1922 onwards, once the historical preoccupation abated, an annual novel appeared. *Men Like Gods* was written 1921-1922, *The Dream* 1922-1923, and *Christina Alberta's Father* 1923-1924. The first two provide, from contrasted angles, glimpses of a World State of the

remote future. *Men Like Gods* carried into that Utopia typical Earthlings of our own day—Earthlings who, Wells acknowledges, got out of his control and began behaving very like such familiar personalities as Churchill, Balfour, and others scarcely less well-known. The episode of Quarantine Crag is admirable story-telling, and despite an occasional excess of parody and discussion, the book as a whole has something of the nostalgic quality of *A Modern Utopia*. *The Dream* reverses the plan; here a few typical Utopians comment upon the world of today. In both, contemporary humanity appears as "poor savages, living only in the bleak dawn of civilisation." [1] Here again are memorable passages (Matilda Good and Uncle John Julip are in the true vein of Wellsian comedy), but neither of these novels marks any artistic or intellectual advance upon earlier work; there is, at best, recovery. More and more the ideas, not the stories or the characters as such, are what interest Wells. These two books might be described as not very satisfactory rewritings of *A Modern Utopia* and *Tono-Bungay*; one might describe *Christina Alberta's Father*—that story of one man's realisation of himself as Man the inheritor of the earth—as *The Soul of a Bishop* speaking through the Cockney lips of *Mr. Polly,* a post-war *Ann Veronica* intervening. Certainly it ranks with *The Soul of a Bishop* as one of the least able and interesting of his books.

He was in 1922 a witness of the sudden death of F. W. Sanderson. On June 15th Sanderson addressed a scientific audience in the Botanical Theatre of University College, London. He seemed, even to those who did not know him, evidently ill; some of his speech was all but incoherent, with rambling parentheses. At the end, Wells, as Chairman, was apologising lightly for these digressions, when Sanderson collapsed on the platform and died a few moments later. Subsequently Wells played some part in planning and writing the official life, but owing to an insistence that its subject's lowly educational beginnings as pupil teacher in an

[1] *The Dream.*

elementary school should be omitted, he withdrew, and the book appeared in 1923 without his name. In that year he wrote his own account of Sanderson, his only biography, *The Story of a Great Schoolmaster,* published in 1924.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE OPEN CONSPIRATOR

§ 1

WHEN in 1924 Wells rejected the Labour Party as lacking creative will, and began instead to write of the revision of democracy and of an Open Conspiracy to transcend all political forms and class distinctions, he was again accused of inconsistency. Yet he is in essence one of the most consistent of contemporary thinkers. He knows what he wants, and like the baby in the advertisements he won't be happy till he gets it. He is no more inconsistent than a man who gets on a bus labelled Bromley to go to Bromley in Kent, and gets off again when he finds that it is, in fact, going to Bromley by Bow. His main fault is a congenital optimism. Always seeking to reach his destination as quickly as possible, he is apt to board promising vehicles a little too readily. Unhappily the omnibus service to the World State is as limited as that to Mandalay. He—and the rest of us—must walk if we want to get there. His proclamation of the Open Conspiracy is in effect his recognition of the pedestrian necessity. It is a return to the New Republic of *Anticipations*. "It will appear first, I believe, as a conscious organisation of intelligent and quite possibly in some cases wealthy men, as a movement having distinct social and political aims, confessedly ignoring most of the existing apparatus of political control, or using it only as an incidental implement in the attainment of these aims. It will be very loosely

organised in its earlier stages, a mere movement of a number of people in a certain direction, who will presently discover with a sort of surprise the common object towards which they are all moving." "A confluent system of trust-owned business organisms, and of universities and reorganised military and naval services may presently discover an essential unity of purpose, presently begin thinking a literature, and behaving like a State." "In its more developed phases I seem to see it as a sort of outspoken secret society, with which even the prominent men of the ostensible state may be openly affiliated. A vast number of men admit the need but hesitate at the means of revolution, and in this conception of a slowly growing new social order organised with open deliberation within the substance of the old, there are no doubt elements of technical treason, but an enormous gain in the thoroughness, efficiency, and stability of the possible change."

All these passages were written in 1900, but they are identical in spirit and detail with what Wells proposed in 1925 and since. The closing chapters of *Anticipations* plainly state Clissold's project for super-national economic directorates creating world-wide federal controls in disregard of the national governments they would eventually displace; and they express, too, most of the doubts and constructive suggestions of *Democracy Under Revision* and *The Open Conspiracy*.[1] The later books at most amplify the detail, perhaps with a maturer grasp of the human factors and greater stress upon the plan as *the* modern form of the religious spirit of service. The New Republicans were apt to be curt with the religious emotions and aspirations, but clearly the New Republic was the form of their faith precisely as the Open Conspiracy is that of their successors. And it is the same form. One might indeed complain that Wells had stood still too long, that he merely repeated himself, but he can scarcely be termed inconsistent.

[1] See also *What I Believe*, an interview printed April 1899, for an even earlier account of the same doubts and suggestions.

Recently—apparently as the result of a friendly week-end spent with Lloyd George—it was rumoured that he had joined the Liberal Party. His denial was prompt; he did not belong, he retorted, to *any* Liberal Party. But the report seemed unlikely at first sight. What his rejection of the Labour Party really signified was that he had done with expedients at last. From the Coefficients and the Fabian Society to the League of Nations and the Labour Party, he had been trying, and setting aside, this instrument and that. In each case he accepted compromise, always to find himself diverging from the path he wished to travel. The Labour Party no less than the others proved a straw—but it was the last straw. Henceforth he would compromise no more; he would preach the Pure Word. So even Proportional Representation is dismissed in *Democracy Under Revision* as a reform irrelevant to government by Samurai —now no longer, as in the days of *Anticipations* and *A Modern Utopia,* the idle dream of a literary man, but pointed to as tentatively working, and effective despite a reprehensible narrowness of outlook, in China, Russia, and Italy. He will, in *The Commonsense of World Peace* and elsewhere, have none of current nationalist peace-diplomacy, regarding it—the London Naval Conference included—as "something done and nothing really changed." "Either you are for Cosmopolis or you are for War." [1] There is no way but the proclamation and propaganda of the World State. Not, naturally, that he expects the World State to spring up in a night by that means; far from it. In *A Forecast of the World's Affairs,* written in 1924, he accepted the conclusion that "the present system of competing and warring sovereign states may and probably will continue for many generations to come," and urged as necessary to bring about the change "a substitution for the present teaching of patriotic prejudice in schools, colleges, newspapers, pulpits, homes, and every channel of diffusion and suggestion, of a teaching at least as effective and comprehensive of the idea and the

[1] *Playing at Peace.*

means of realising the idea of a common world organisation to keep the peace and exploit the resources of the race and of the earth collectively in the common interest." To create such a teaching was his task; he must play, in the twentieth century, the part played by Roger Bacon seven hundred years ago.

The comparison is his own; he makes it at some length in a memorandum upon his coming book, *The Science of Work and Wealth*. He has, he says, suffered this disease of "Roger-Baconism" since the days of *Anticipations*—but indeed one might say all his life. In his very earliest surviving story of any moment, *The Chronic Argonauts,* the hero, Dr. Nebogipfel, believed that he was "a man born out of my time—a man thinking the thoughts of a wiser age, doing things and believing things that men now *cannot* understand, and that in the years ordained to me there was nothing but silence and suffering for my soul—unbroken solitude, men's bitterest pain. I knew I was an Anachronic Man; my age was still to come. One filmy hope alone held me to life, a hope to which I clung until it had become a certain thing. Thirty years of unremitting toil and deepest thought among the hidden things of matter and form and life, and then *that,* the Chronic Argo, *the ship that sails through time,* and now I go to join my generation, to journey through the ages till my time has come." If that indeed Wells could not do, still the impulse remained to draw him forward to the future in story and essay, and later to the attempt to shape that future even in the present. For thirty years that has been *his* labour, and the mainspring of his impatience. At last he has learnt if not patience then acceptance of his fate. He can be neither Nebogipfel nor a greater magician to create a new world in the twinkling of an eye, but might he not hope perhaps to exercise the function of Roger Bacon, who seemed to his contemporaries merely a tiresome, scolding, futile scribbler, and yet saw beyond them all? He too, confident of his prophetic validity, will sketch out plans for men unborn to follow. They *will*

follow, he believes; they may amend, they may in some respects run counter to his expectations, but still they will be developing the impulse he has germinated in the succession of his writings.

Some of the causes of this change towards acceptance may be found in the movement of social and international conditions generally. Towards 1924 the sense of urgency created by immediately post-war circumstances was visibly slackening. Europe seemed to be pulling through. It became evident that there was, though not recovery, at least respite. The race was now not between education and catastrophe in the sense of simple collapse, but between education and the still militarist nationalisms which sooner or later must lead again to war. There was time, certainly not to play, but at least to take the longer view the educational process necessitated. But more personal influences were also at work. From 1922 to 1924 active preparations were in hand for the publication in twenty-eight volumes of the collected Atlantic Edition of Wells's Works, and for this purpose he had to re-read the main bulk of his writings and sum them up in an Introduction and series of prefaces. What, he asked, did it all amount to? "The gist of it is an extraordinarily sustained and elaborated adverse criticism of the world as it is, a persistent refusal to believe that this is the best or even the most interesting of all possible worlds. There is a developing attempt culminating in *The Outline of History* to show that the world of men is only temporarily what it is, and might be altered to an enormous extent. There is a search through every sort of revolutionary project and effort for the material for conclusive alteration. The total effect of these books of mine on my mind, is of a creature trying to find its way out of a prison into which it has fallen." He had come "to realise the broad lines upon which we can work" for the freedom of the World State "through a great extension of the scientific spirit to the mental field, and through a deliberate reconstruction of

social and economic life upon the framework of a new, far-reaching educational organisation." [1]

Certainly his change of attitude took place about this time, for in one of the Atlantic Edition prefaces, written in 1923 or 1924, but withdrawn and replaced two years later, he described *Joan and Peter* as "very probably the last long novel he will ever write. There are phases in a literary life and just as he no longer wanted to write short stories after 1906 or 1907 so now he notes the dying out in him of the spacious literary ambitions that led to the planning of *Tono-Bungay* and *The Research Magnificent.* The great novel which tries to give a whole phase in the experience of a community does not seem to matter enough nowadays, but whether it is that the times have changed or that he has changed he cannot decide. He has by no means said good-bye to the writing of stories, he may still, for all he can tell, live to write many more stories, but they are not likely to fall into the form of these long novels any more." Before the end of 1924 *The World of William Clissold,* longest of all his novels, was in hand, and this reversal of his decision marks, I think, the change in his attitude. To the man eager for immediate results the writing of long, spacious, detailed works—in the amended preface he admits their disadvantage beside the shorter novel "more rapidly read and more easily appreciated"—might well seem a fiddling while Rome burned; to the man accepting the longer view they might equally well seem the most effective of all means of inculcating an attitude to life, a view of the world as it is and as it might be.

§ 2

The World of William Clissold remains the major as well as the first fictional production of this latest period. It is, in any account of its author's development, an outstanding work. For a grudging reception which on the whole under-

[1] *Year of Prophesying: An Outbreak of Auto-Obituary.*

rated it, the manner of its issue seemed largely responsible; it was announced with an unprecedented flourish of publisher's trumpets, and appeared unnecessarily in three volumes at portentous monthly intervals. The advertising was persistent and sumptuous, and behind such grand processional acclamation the books themselves came limping and self-conscious. It was as though a hen should take to itself megaphones to announce the production of a perfectly honest egg.

Admittedly it was planned on the large scale as the comprehensive account of what one man had made of the world in the course of a busy and spacious life, of his speculations and conclusions, social, historical, economic, sexual, and religious. As such it is noteworthy. It contains not a few pages of very fine prose, passages of concentrated thought clearly expressed. And yet, in the final analysis, and set as a novel beside *Tono-Bungay* and *The New Machiavelli,* it lacks *life.* It marks Wells's unqualified acceptance of the novel as the vehicle not for life but for the discussion of ideas. It is his most elaborate attempt to create for the novel a form which shall subordinate story to discussion, in which the story shall no more than illustrate the ideas, link them to life. True, he asks: "Is it not quite as much 'life' to meet and deal with a new idea as to meet and deal with a new lover?",[1] but that begs the whole problem of the novelist. The life and power of the idea are in the thinker, not in the thought as a thing apart. No idea lives until a man has believed in it, not merely with his mind but with all his being. Until Clissold lives, his ideas are so many words, interesting perhaps as intellectual dexterities but lacking human value. But Wells is so intent upon the ideas that Clissold never does live. For Wells that does not matter; for him the ideas are already living—in relation to himself. That is the point. If he had come forward to say in person: "These ideas have moved me—they are my life," at once they would have become vital. As it is they remain pointless precisely to the degree that Wells does not back them. Actually, of

[1] *William Clissold: Note Before the Title Page.*

course, what matters most in them he had either long been leading up to or affirmed with little delay in *The Open Conspiracy*. Clissold is not Wells, but of each it may be said that he is the New Republican.

The writings subsequent to *Clissold* are secondary to it in the sense that ideologically they do not move beyond it. They are all implied in it. But in another respect the novels at least mark a considerable advance. All are novels of ideas (that *The King Who Was a King* is a film scenario is a point of technical rather than actual form), but there is a progressive change in the relationship of story and idea. The development is hardly apparent in *Meanwhile,* written in 1926 immediately after the General Strike; here tale and thought live side by side almost as strangers. The heart of the book is its account of the Strike, and this may well stand as a vivid piece of social history.

The King Who Was a King—planned before *Meanwhile,* perhaps even before *Clissold,* but recast and written in 1928—is an attempt, inspired by the requests of film manufacturers for an original story, to implicate the cinema in World State propaganda, "to show that a hard, fairly complex argument can be stated more clearly and more effectively upon the screen than in any other way. In no other way would it be possible to say so plainly that the Peace of the World can only be secured through the establishment of world controls of the common interests of mankind." [1] It serves that purpose effectively, but it is even farther from life than *Clissold*. Its characters are not men and women, but heroes and villains, Makers and Destroyers, puppets wholly symbolic; certainly unity of action and idea is achieved, but at the expense of humanity. It is instructive to compare this book with the early *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1898) which it resembles in many ways. But whereas the Sleeper "dies, as all his kind must die, with no certainty of either victory or defeat," [2] in the later story the hero kills his opponent

[1] *King Who Was a King.*
[2] Preface, *The Sleeper Awakes.*

and triumphs decisively. In that contrast between artistic truth and propagandist necessity one may find an epitome of thirty years!

Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island, written in 1927, marks a more hopeful development. There is symbolism—all Rampole Island is symbolic—but there is satire, too, in the account of the hero's passage from complete confidence in the world at large to a state of doubt and disillusion, and in the very choice of the Megatheria as symbols of existing "states, organisations, and institutions." Symbolism generalises and desiccates—it demands that one see not the thing portrayed but what it stands for; satire individualises and animates—it has the vivifying quality of laughter—it personifies the object of attack as symbolism in its detachment never does, it makes the idea one with the story. In *Mr. Blettsworthy* this final identification does not appear; symbolism prevails. The tale, like the actual rock of Rampole Island, is transparent (presumably that is itself a symbol); one is invited continually to look not at it but through it.

It is only in *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* that this duality is finally dissolved. This is Wells's best story, as such, since 1914. The attitude, the ideas, the message remain, but their sting is where it should be, in the tale. Its characters are all embodiments of points of view, but they live individually and gloriously—as caricatures. They are nationalism, militarism, traditionalism themselves parodied and sent marching and boasting about the world in comic dress to reveal their own absurdity. So mockery does the work of the moralist, giving to story-teller and humourist liberty to make free with the material he offers them.

This is Wells's latest form, and it may well prove final. Satire is the natural medium for the artist—such as Swift, Voltaire, Anatole France—whose purpose and attitude are primarily intellectual. It indicates a loss in humanity; it precludes Pollys, Lewishams, Susan Ponderevos, even Mr. Popes. (Penguin Island has no Potwell Inns.) But it is undeniably effective.

§ 3

It is, however, not in the novels but in *The Open Conspiracy* and *The Science of Life* that the main work of these years is contained. Wells describes *The Open Conspiracy* as his confession of faith and statement of working principles. It sets forth, clearly and simply, his religion and his morality. It is the key to what, in his final phase, he stands for, summarising views long familiar to his readers—his belief in Man as the ultimate synthesising object of all human endeavour, in the power of mankind to control its destiny, and in its urgent need to realise and achieve that control before it destroys itself. Essentially, it is a modern faith, looking to no heaven above; the religious instinct, to sacrifice self in transcendent purpose, must express itself in the service of the species, in raising human living from chaos to progressive power and happiness. This is to be achieved by vaguely but increasingly organised groups of individuals (one may call them indifferently Open Conspirators, Natural Aristocrats, Samurai, New Republicans) working towards the establishment of world unity and collective ownership, and postulating the provisional nature of all national governments, the nuisance of patriotic militancies, the need for world controls of transport, staple production, disease and population, and finally, "the supreme duty of subordinating the personal life to the creation of a world directorate capable of these tasks, and to the general advancement of human knowledge, capacity and power." [1]

In nothing does this Open Conspiracy return more essentially to New Republicanism than in its appeal to a minority as the effective governing force. This is the point elaborated in *Democracy Under Revision*. Wells has tried to make his critics understand that the revision of democracy is very different from its rejection; his scheme might be described as government by those who care sufficiently for

[1] *Open Conspiracy.*

the impersonal issue to sacrifice themselves in its service. His argument against contemporary political democracy is its inability to produce a better leader than the party politician, high-priest of vote-catching, obviously unable to cope with the urgent problems of the modern world. His substitute is essentially a device to circumvent the drag imposed by the dull and base upon all intelligent progress. It is a conspiracy in that it is a minority plotting against a majority; it is open because imbued with the scientific spirit of free criticism; it is democratic to the degree that membership is barred to none who will qualify for it. In its primary stage it offers less a plan than "a conception of life out of which efforts, organisations, and new orientations will arise.... Its opening task must be the elaboration, exposition and propaganda of this common idea, and arising out of this, the incomparably vaster task of its realisation." [1] First establish the will towards a World State, he says, and the creative means will readily appear.

It is as the seriously considered contribution of an Open Conspirator towards establishing such a will, that *The Science of Life,* with its companion works, *The Outline of History* and the still unwritten *Science of Work and Wealth,* must be regarded. The trilogy was evidently conceived as such almost contemporaneously with the writing of the *Outline,* but not until the more settled period following 1924 and the acceptance of the longer perspective did it appear possible for him to proceed with it. "The general idea of all these writings, finished or projected, is to present altogether, first a complete modern world outlook, politically speaking, then the moral data of the new time, and then the forecast of a collective economic policy, in a form accessible to a person of ordinary education. It is the presentation of the three-fold basis for a modern ideology, historical, biological and economic." [2] In short, they comprise his "New Bible" for the citizen of the World State, "embodying the necessary

[1] *Open Conspiracy,* Revised Edition.
[2] *Open Conspiracy.*

ideas of the new time in a form adapted to the current reading public." [1] They offer the minimum of knowledge which, whether gathered from their pages or elsewhere, he considers essential for a reasonable and intelligent modern life.

Work on *The Science of Life* began in 1927. In view of the specialised and often highly technical matter to be gathered, synthesised, and stated, he judged it best, despite his own biological training and interests, to have as collaborators two working biologists—Julian Huxley, the distinguished grandson of his teacher at South Kensington, and his own elder son, G. P. Wells. They spent a year in sketching a preparatory outline of chapters and sections, and in getting the material together. The book presents a genuine collaboration in detail as in scheme, each portion being in some degree the handiwork of all three, though Wells as initiator and organiser was regarded by the other two as the controlling partner. Especially he interposed himself as intermediary between his specialists and the public; what was not instantly clear to him in their accounts he surmised would be improbably so to the ordinary reader; this he made the primary test of every page, and his collaborators allowed him "quite autocratic powers of direction." Serial publication in fortnightly parts began in the spring of 1929, and the complete book appeared towards the end of 1930.

It is an attempt, extraordinarily informative at any rate to the layman, to relate the nature, scope, development, and processes of life in all its known forms. It opens with an account of "the body machine" of "the most familiar of living things—man," and passes to a review of the chief forms of life and of "the incontrovertible fact of evolution." Then it embarks upon a grand conspectus of the history and spectacle of life, from its first earthly dawning, in all its forms and combinations, to the coming of mankind. It studies life healthy and diseased; traces the development of instinct and intelligence, thought and feeling, from the fishes

[1] *Open Conspiracy.*

and insects to the intricacies of human personality; and culminates in a vision of mankind regarded collectively as Man, one species among many species, yet proving his kingship by a growing control over all the life of the world. At a first glance its relevance to the World State may seem less obvious than that of the *Outline* or even the coming *Science of Work and Wealth,* but it is designed to lead, and does lead, to the same view of Man as one single, ever-evolving, and at last consciously controlling organism. It is a gallant and impressive—and altogether enthralling—attempt to give the common reader, in terms at once imaginative and true, an understanding of himself as one with all the life of the world. One is impelled to term it almost a finer and more pregnant piece of work than the *Outline*. The truth is, of course, that they are complementary.

So eager was Wells for the completion of his trilogy that he took up the third part before he had done with the second. He had already found assistants and arranged for publication before he realised the unprecedented difficulties of the task that faced him. *The Outline of History* had presented the world-community as historically one, *The Science of Life* as biologically one; now *The Science of Work and Wealth* must show it economically one. It must review the entire economic life of mankind; it must "assemble into one spectacle the traditions, necessities, conventions, methods, devices and inventions upon which are based the conflicts and co-operations of human communities (which are now so irresistibly running together into one world community) and so display the need and nature of such revisions of the methods of economic working and direction as lie before us."[1] But the material for such an account did not exist anything like so coherently as for the two earlier works; an immense amount of preliminary compilation was needed. It was begun, but Wells was not satisfied with the progress made, and this, with his labours on *The Science of Life* still in hand, exhausted him to the

[1] Unpublished memorandum.

point of despair. Towards the end of 1929 he decided to abandon the project, explain his conception in brief outline, and leave it to someone younger to carry out. In November he went abroad "feeling horribly old and done-for," depressed by his failure in an important issue. But recovery was quick, and before the end of the year he made up his mind to go ahead, replanning on a different scale. A change of collaborators occurred—the harmonious association of *The Science of Life* project was difficult to repeat—and he will probably carry out the work (perhaps under an amended title) as he did *The Outline of History,* single-handed, with the help of a number of advisors and contributors.

§ 4

His personal life since the war needs little comment. Few other living writers have created such world-wide interest in their work, and so in themselves, as he, and that interest has occasioned its response. He has no more striven to conceal than to advertise himself, and the most casual reader will be familiar with articles, interviews, photographs.

The years have brought him a continuously widening circle of friendships with those people best worth knowing in every class the world over. A list of those who have tasted the hospitalities of Easton Glebe would represent all that is most vital in contemporary literature, art, science, economics, politics, and intellectual life generally, irrespective of years or party. Yet something of this aspect of his life closed with the death of Mrs. Wells in 1927—closed then even more definitely than with his selling of Easton Glebe in 1930. "I couldn't stop there," he told an interviewer. "My life there ended when my wife died. I should soon be an old man there. And I don't want to be old. It's not going to be a pleasant world for the venerable pose." [1]

The last decade—since his illness towards the end of

[1] *Daily Herald,* August 7th, 1930.

1920—has marked a return not so much of ill-health as of a need for constant care. To preserve a continuous fitness and working efficiency he has had to spend more and more of the winter months out of England. A severe attack of catarrh ("it has played a much larger share in my life than you would suppose; it has interfered with travel and kept me out of public life") sent him almost direct from the Washington Conference to Algeciras in Spain to recover; two years later another attack took him to Portugal and Madeira; and each subsequent winter has been spent abroad, often at the house built to his own plans and design near Grasse in the south of France. Since the war he has journeyed freely about Europe—at first by air whenever possible, but later abandoning that method as altogether too limited and unorganised for pleasure under existing nationalist conditions. Yet travelling by train, at any rate in those rare countries which take literature seriously, has also its penalties; when in Czecho-Slovakia some few years ago he would be called from his bed in the early morning to find the train drawn up at a small station, and the local mayor waiting to present the town's official greetings.

The late C. F. G. Masterman once declared Wells's life to be the very best in the world, abundant, many-sided, satisfying upon every level, and not least in its consciousness of work worthily accomplished and widely appreciated. One conceives him indeed as living (just as much as is possible in the world of today) the unfettered life of the man of the future—busy, productive, individual, free from the narrower conventions and seeking and regarding no honour but his own name.

His public appearances as a lecturer have never been frequent and become less so. On March 15th, 1927, however, he spoke at the Sorbonne in Paris on *Democracy Under Revision*—the highest distinction, he said, that was ever likely to fall to him. Two years later, on April 15th, 1929, he addressed the Society for International Discussion at the Reichstag in Berlin on *The Commonsense of World Peace*. Also

in 1929 he broadcast two talks from the London Station of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the first repeating the substance of his Reichstag address, the second a discussion of his outlook on life, his "point of view."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A PERSONAL INTERPRETATION

§ 1

ATTENTION in this account has centred principally upon Wells as man and as artist, less specifically upon the thinker. It is not proposed to remedy this deficiency, partly because to do so adequately would need almost another volume, partly for the more personal reason that while agreeing with most of his social and political ideas as practical suggestions I am, as biographer and literary critic, interested in them mainly for the light they throw upon the development of the artist. Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, in his capable book, *The World of H. G. Wells*—which, with Mr. F. H. Doughty's *H. G. Wells: Educationist,* may be recommended to those seeking comment upon the ideas as such—actually declares Wells never "a synthetic thinker but a sceptical artist, whose writings are subjective even when they seem to be the opposite, ... not a sociologist, but, so to say, an artist of society." That is true, but it is not the whole truth. Like Clissold, Wells is in the last resort philosophically quite prepared "to admit that there is no plot nor scheme nor drama nor pattern in the flow of events as they are apprehended by human minds, but my disposition is diametrically opposed to my philosophy. I have never encountered even a stain on a wall or a glowing cavity in a fire upon which my mind could not impose a design. It is still more natural for me, a moral being inherently, to impose some dramatic conception upon my universe as a whole—if only

to get an orientation for my living, a standard of judgment by which to estimate the good or evil of my decisions." In this matter he is at one with his own New Republicans, who are "disposed to find, and consequently will find, an effect of purpose in the totality of things." [1] To that extent he undoubtedly makes his ideas because, as he has said, he feels the need of them, but it cannot be overlooked that if the manner of the choice is artistic and intuitional, the form it takes is notably intellectual.

His characteristic veins of thought may be classified, roughly, under five main headings: (1) A development from the relative fatalism of *The Time Machine* to the assertion of mankind's practically absolute power—given will—to control its destinies. (2) A growing insistence upon the need to devise means by which conscious human intelligence may gain and utilise that control. (3) An increasing realisation of the transitory nature of all forms and institutions, and in particular the change in political realities, pointing inevitably to a world organisation, brought about by the change of scale and economic range resulting from modern transport facilities. (4) The emerging conception of the world situation as a continuous conflict between tradition and new conditions, and the need for a new ideology to cope with new conditions. (5) A movement from the acceptance of individuality as uniqueness to belief in a super-human synthesis transcending and absorbing individuality in a growing and increasingly self-conscious collective Mind of the Race, in which Science represents the accumulated knowledge and men but transitory thoughts, and which alone offers immortal (though impersonal) continuation and purpose.

What all these groups have in common is a conception of life as primarily change and movement. There is no Being but Becoming: all centre about that. "Seen through the scheme of the historian or biologist," wrote Vernon Lee in an open letter to Wells twenty-four years ago, "life is a *ceaseless becoming*. But looked at, or rather felt, in a different

[1] *Anticipations.*

way, life takes the significance of a *ceaseless being*; and as a being, not a becoming, does life affect the real creature and constitute real experience." [1] In the evolution of his ideas the tendency, at least in the latter part of his life, is continuously away from real experience, from reality, until he can say (the actual words are Clissold's, but they only sum up what Wells has often stated less quotably): "Fundamentally I am outside life, receiving experiences. I like and want to do things with life; but I am not of the substance of life."

§ 2

Now clearly that is not the attitude of the artist, intuitively understanding and accepting life because he knows himself to be of its substance, but that of the scientist, detached and analytic; and in fact the primary element in Wells's development as a literary man has been the continuous internal opposition of these two attitudes, between a temperament essentially artistic and a training (plus a certain intellectual inclination) essentially scientific. He himself expresses the conflict by saying that he is "temperamentally egotistic and romantic, intellectually clearly aware that the egotistic and romantic must go." [2] It is certainly the instinctive artist, interested in life as intensity, not as order or instrument, who declared in a letter to Miss Healey in 1888 his preference for St. Pancras over "new, respectable, conservative, articulate, detached or semi-detached, unsympathetic and commercial" West Hampstead: "St. Pancras is old, dirty, immoral, inarticulate, crowded, sympathetic, starving, cheating, livid, smoky and loveable; and yet there is a majesty also about St. Pancras that West Hampstead has not—St. Pancras' sins are deadly sins, its troubles are vital troubles; it hungers and thirsts and longs. Hampstead's sins are social peccadillos, its troubles deal with matters such as making £150 look

[1] *On Modern Utopias.*
[2] Atlantic Edition, Volume 5, Preface.

like £400, it dresses and performs and is satisfied." It is the same feeling precisely which appears twenty years later in a sentence from *First and Last Things:* "When I sit upon the bench, a respectable magistrate, and commit some battered reprobate for trial for this lurid offence or that, or send him or her to prison for drunkenness or such-like indecorum, the doubt drifts into my mind which of us after all is indeed getting nearest to the keen edge of life." In 1897, in his article on *The Novels of George Gissing,* he flatly defined as both task and warrant of the mature novelist "the vivid appreciation of things as they are," as opposed to the immature "condemnation of life in the incompatability between the refined way of life and life as it is." His very earliest efforts, preceding even *The Chronic Argonauts* and long since destroyed, were realistic novels, and though, later, he refrained for material reasons and because he doubted his capacities, throughout the period of the romances the artist grew steadily in power and ambition. His letters, the growth of characterisation in the romances, the writing of *Love and Mr. Lewisham* at financial loss, all reveal his interest as in the "studies of personality" rather than the "imaginative gymnastics," his engrossment, characteristic of the artist, in the eternal mystery of man, the potentialities and failures of the individual being. Confirmation appears again in the tendency of the romances to satire. In novels and romances alike the fundamental question is, "What is man?" In the romances it is answered with ever more penetration, ever greater bitterness, and ever wider vision, from the standpoint of distant worlds; in the novels ever more sympathetically, ever more comprehensively, from that of a man among men. In the romances the arbiter is the detached reasoning intelligence, in the novels the intuition; in both there is with each volume imaginative advance, increase in depth and certainty, keener apprehension of reality. And as that apprehension deepens, so the pain of the world, its disorder, its waste and want, oppress him more and more. He has looked at the world of today from the far limits of past

and future, from without and from within, and the burden of its distress has come upon him. It was only natural, perhaps, that in a critical period intellectual training should come to the aid of temperament. Where a purer artist might have achieved a deeper vision he turned instead to the easier practical suggestions of Fabianism, to the ideas of *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making*. The romances had revealed the triumph of the artist upon the plane of the scientist; *Anticipations* foreshadowed the ultimate victory of the scientist upon the plane of the artist.

In this connection *The Sea Lady,* its immediate successor, is not perhaps without significance. Wells has described it as the story of *The New Machiavelli* told in terms of romance, and it is possible that the later book, too, has profounder meanings than appear on the surface. In *The Sea Lady* at least it is surely no merely sexual passion which enslaves Chatteris, but an intimation of wider mysteries, a whispering of better dreams. These Chatteris but glimpses, and then: "Progress, Good of Humanity, Public Spirit—none of these things interest me really." He might strive to get back to "the spacious design" of his political career, but it "doesn't grip my imagination, it doesn't grip my imagination." The truth peers out from the very phrases of his attempted renunciation: "I'm going to fall in with the species; I'm going to take my place in the ranks in that great battle for the future which is the meaning of life.... I've had the Dream, but you see I keep hold of reason. Here, with the flame burning, I renounce it. I make my choice.... Renunciation! Always—renunciation! That is life for all of us. We have desires, only to deny them, senses that we all must starve. We can live only as a part of ourselves. Why should *I* be exempt? For me she is evil. For me she is death...." Death indeed for the intellectual man working for reform and the future, and yet—this talk of better dreams? Is it wholly idle to discern in the Sea Lady, "flapping her way into the writer's imagination upon Sandgate beach one day in 1900," [1]

[1] Atlantic Edition, Volume 5, Preface.

the natural reaction of the true novelist from the intellectual concentration of *Anticipations,* the phantom of the artistic attitude haunting the unrepentant but uneasy intellectual with dreams of a life justified not in relation to purpose but in itself alone? Had not Wells his doubts? "For some there is an escape when the whole life rushes to a moment," says the Sea Lady, and the narrator remarks: "Now there is clearly no sense in that sentence, to my mind." It is indeed intellectually meaningless, and yet intuitionally how profoundly suggestive. At the end of the story the Sea Lady lured Chatteris down into the deeps from which there is no returning, but Mr. H. G. Wells, of Arnold House, Sandgate, remained with the policeman on the beach, "the interrogation of his lantern" (or even more aptly, the lantern of his interrogation) "going out for a little way upon the mysterious vast serenity of night."

In spirit he remained a long while—almost a decade—hesitating whether not, after all, to follow that path of quivering moonshine out across those dangerous waters. When at last he turned his back, and retreated to safer levels, he was a wiser man, perhaps, but certainly a sadder novelist!

A simple chronological list of the books written in these years might seem to suggest the almost unqualified triumph of the artist. The romances approach more and more to the novels, and the interest in individuals, in the "personalities thwarted and crippled by the defects of our contemporary civilisation," increases continuously in *Kipps, The War in the Air, Tono-Bungay, Ann Veronica* and *Mr. Polly.* Constantly Wells discovers more fineness in, exhibits more sympathy for, particular men than mankind. But simultaneously a subtler but very significant change is taking place; his "admirable" man progressively becomes the scientifically trained reasonable man. The intellectual man. Mankind today moves to self-destruction—that is the implication of *The War in the Air.* Mankind must change, or not so much change as give full development to its finest potentialities—that is made clear in *In the Days of the Comet.* The first

step towards this change must be the conscious development by men and women of these potentialities in and for the guidance of their fellows—that is the vital essence of *A Modern Utopia* and *First and Last Things* (and, incidentally, of *The Food of the Gods*).

All these books reveal a preoccupation with an unreasonable world and a search for a way out, a way to something socially and materially better, to a world of men and women like ourselves but educated and organised. He indicates that way out in the assertion of the reasonable, the intellectual man, who alone can save mankind from self-annihilation. At last, in *Tono-Bungay,* he shows the completely reasonable man in conflict with his world. Then, in *The History of Mr. Polly,* he shows, in a quite different mood, a quite different type of man in conflict with *his* world. These two books are, by general consent, his finest works, his closest contacts with reality, the outposts of his soul's adventure. Forward from them he has not gone, for they represent a height of artistic integrity he could no longer sustain, and thenceforward the ascendancy of the scientist becomes increasingly manifest.

The inward conflict between intuition and intellect, latent in many of Wells's books, is nowhere so evident as in *First and Last Things,* written only just before, or even during, the critical period. Here one finds again and again, usually in isolated sentences, a certitude of mystical statement. "Things move to Power and Beauty; I say that much and I have said all that I can say." "To me beauty is a final, quite indefinable thing. Either you understand it or you do not. . . . There is something that shows suddenly— . . . it is right, it is commanding, it is, to use theological language, the revelation of God." And this is the last sentence in the book: "In the ultimate I know, though I cannot prove my knowledge in any way whatever, that everything is right and all things mine." "In the ultimate *I know*"—yet at the crisis he cannot carry his knowledge over, make it a working knowledge. The truth is, as *Tono-Bungay* and other books

reveal, that he has chosen the intellectual attitude, and therefore has to reject all that he cannot rationalise. At the final point he is prepared to throw the intellect overboard and say without hesitation that he *knows,* that "everything is right," but by far the greater part of *First and Last Things* is, in its nature, the exposition of a rationalistic attitude; the two sorts of apprehension are allowed to exist, rather strangely, side by side. It is in *Tono-Bungay* that for the first time a man's whole world and being are submitted to the judgment of the intellectual consciousness.

It is to some extent this rigidity of treatment, this relentlessness of judgment, which makes *Tono-Bungay* the amazing story that it is—one of the few books in modern English fiction which can be described as "thought-adventure" without hesitation or qualification. It is thought adventure and nothing else. It has sex in it, but no "love-interest," it has conquest, but no victory; it is essentially the search of George Ponderevo, the personification of the intellectual consciousness, for a reality which will stand against all his tests. Again and again, without cessation, he applies them to every level and phase of society, and society crashes about him. Life breaks down at that inhuman questioning, until at last there seems nothing left. In the last chapter, one of the most splendid passages Wells has ever written, is focussed the whole spirit of the book. The reticent prose drives on like the destroyer it tells of; it comes very near to poetry, it exalts and moves beyond all rational explanation. "I and my destroyer tear out to the unknown across a great grey space.... Out to the open we go, to windy freedom and trackless ways. Light after light goes down. England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass—pass. The river passes—London passes, England passes...." This is the book itself! George Ponderevo, himself the destroyer, has passed by and darkened the old lights, has found these prides and devotions but empty things, and goes beyond them out to new hori-

zons. Into darkness he goes, into darkness.... There is not in all literature, one might say, so exact an image of the progress and end of the intellectual consciousness.

But that is not quite the book's end. On the next page, the last, we find something of which there has been no hint before. "But through the confusion sounds another note. Through the confusion something drives, something that is at once human achievement and the most inhuman of all existing things.... It is something we draw by pain and effort out of the heart of life, that we disentangle and make clear.... I see it always as austerity, as beauty. This thing we make clear is the heart of life. It is the one enduring thing.... I do not know what it is, this something, except that it is supreme. It is a something, a quality, an element, one may find now in colours, now in forms, now in sounds, now in thoughts. It emerges from life with each year one lives and feels... but the how and why of it are all beyond the compass of my mind." And then: "I fell into thought that was nearly formless, into doubts and dreams that have no words." What is this last page but a repudiation, a confession of failure, of the intellectual consciousness? Its utmost power has discovered no ultimate reality beyond this worthless material reality; that is the inevitable victory of the intellect, and in the moment of victory there comes defeat. Such victory is unbearable, a thing which the soul cannot admit; in the vital hour Wells fails, and has to take refuge in a conception which, whatever it is, certainly has nothing to do with the intellectual consciousness.

I doubt, indeed, whether that last page was not forced in quite against the original design. The value of *Tono-Bungay* to me lies in its effort to find a final reality; in it man the individual carries the banner of the intellect to the last barrier—it is only when he is beaten back that his deeper self cries out an instinctive knowledge.

What followed is interesting. Finding it impossible at that time to continue satisfactorily with *Ann Veronica,* a study in personality already in hand and essentially in the

manner of *Tono-Bungay,* he cut it short. And immediately, just as after *Anticipations* he had written *The Sea Lady,* he launched with an effect of happy release into *The History of Mr. Polly.* It is a book that stands alone. There may be in other volumes pages and parts—even large parts—which seem to come close to it. Some chapters of *Kipps,* the first quarter of *Bealby,* pages of *The Dream.* But *Mr. Polly* alone is completed all in one mood, sustaining its quality to the end, pure gold; in it alone there is no bitterness, the artist is triumphant. As in the last page of *Tono-Bungay,* so here, after that great battle, Wells turns back to the intuitive vision, the sheer artistic knowledge which has always existed deep within him, but which never before had achieved expression so free and complete. *Mr. Polly* is what it is because it is neither what Wells thought nor what he believed, but what he *knew.* In some of the later books, *Christina Alberta's Father,* for example, he may seem superficially much more completely himself; in *Mr. Polly* he is much more actually so.

Being what he was, he could not preserve that vision, and the book remains, uniquely, just a promise of the joy and beauty he might have achieved had he been finally and consistently true to himself as artist, as *Tono-Bungay* is a promise of what he might have achieved had he been true to the intellectual consciousness. He could be neither; temperament and training tore him between them, and thus divided he could not even conceive a self sufficiently strong to stand alone in its integrity. He had therefore to see in the failure of the intellectual consciousness the failure of man as individual. From that intolerable loneliness which was George Ponderevo's end he flies, and the later books almost without exception are the record of that flight to something stronger and more enduring than he can find within himself.

Even immediately following *Mr. Polly* a change is noticeable in the series of novels from *The New Machiavelli* to *The Research Magnificent.* Their heroes have it in common that "through their voluntary actions they proposed to en-

lighten the collective mind and stir up the collective will." [1] In *Marriage* Trafford tells his wife: "I've always felt you're a finer individual than me, I've never had a doubt of it.... And yet—I'm a deeper and bigger thing than you. I reach up to something you don't reach up to." In *Tono-Bungay* Wells had striven for the vindication of the man as individual; now he says that there is something finer, to put away one's self in the service of mankind. The element of priggishness in these men, their creator says, "derived from their failure to realise that the impulse to serve mankind comes from a source outside of and greater than one's individual good intentions." [2] From *Marriage* to the most recent books, the insufficiency of the individual life is insisted upon increasingly; the Mind of the Race dominates more and more as the transcending synthesis. Nothing in the later work is more significant than this recession from individualism—unless it be the dwindling of artistic power, the recession from the original keen intimate contact with life itself. "Between God and the believer there is no other way, there is nothing else, but self-surrender and the ending of self." [3] All his heroes, from Trafford to Clissold and Sempack, come to that. "That cherished personal life which men and women struggled to round off and make noble and perfect, disappears from the scheme of things." [4] Individualism becomes "after all a by-path in the history of life," [5] a temporary "biological device which has served its end in evolution and will decline," [6] and "getting out of one's individuality" [7] the only salvation. Wells appears, in fact, as a Romantic rejecting the Romantic tradition, even as he is an artist rejecting art. For Romanticism *is* individualism; it is that assertion of human uniqueness, material and spiritual, which is the sig-

[1] *First and Last Things,* Revised Edition.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *God the Invisible King.*
[4] *Christina Alberta's Father.*
[5] *Joan and Peter.*
[6] *Points of View,* III.
[7] *Secret Places of the Heart.*

nificant element in all post-Renaissance art and thought; it is the knowledge that, ultimately, each man is alone in the universe, that the perception of reality, if not reality itself, is wholly subjective, that the human individual is, for the individual, the only conceivable unit of consciousness. Intellect and intuition—these are the instruments of individual thought and feeling. Wells set aside intuition to follow the path of the intellect, only to find he could not tread it to the bitter end. He might reach towards but he could not sustain either the poetic acceptance of a Chekhov or the supreme metaphysical courage of a Dostoevsky. He was perhaps too essentially English, not enough of "a queer fellow." There is truth, though incomplete, in Mr. C. E. M. Joad's description of him as "a glorified edition" of the ordinary man. His genius was always (if the distinction may be allowed) comic rather than sublime. It is a form of genius which does not penetrate less deeply or less essentially to the eternal realities, but its handicaps are heavier, it is less easily able to rise above its limitations. Shakespeare's was both comic and sublime, and he rose—how splendidly the later plays show—above the insistent questioning of the intellectual problem. In that, as artist, Wells has failed, as most men fail, and it is hard to believe that after all these years he can reverse such defeat and emerge victorious.

§ 3

The inevitable consequence has already been noted in the diminution of his artistic vitality. Caught, as it appeared, "wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born," he had to find some refuge from that intolerable loneliness, and since he could go neither forward nor back was bound at last to take shelter in a faith which seems to some based less upon knowledge than desire. "A consciousness of something greater than ourselves, the immortal soul of the race, is taking control of the direction of

our lives," he asserts, and presents that as the only escape from "the ultimate frustration of every individual desire in age, enfeeblement, and death." [1] Is it really such? Thirty-five years ago in the *Saturday Review* he himself declared such a triumph over death to be purely formal: "The life that endures is life only in an abstract sense. It is individual life that appeals to our emotions, individual death that broods over our joys.... Mortal man and the immortal protozoa have the same barren immortality; the individuals perish,... the type alone persists." [2] Can the individual today move beyond that? Only, Wells probably would reply, by adopting "the point of view of the species." But is there any such thing—anything more, indeed, than an individual or series of individuals hypothesising such a point of view? To conceive a Mind of the Race as self-conscious is possible, but actually to enter into and share that self-consciousness is a dream and a delusion. The very realisation of a collective consciousness is an individual realisation, and signifies only as it enters into and affects individuality.

Even deserting the individual objection, does the continuity of the species in fact signify? For its *immortality* there is rather less evidence than for individual immortality. The sum of all Wells's assertions amounts to no more than Boon's reply when Wilkins asked why the Mind of the Race might not be "just a gleam of conscious realization that passes from darkness to darkness." "Because," Boon said, "I will not have it so." And yet short of immortality (in any case a word without meaning for the finite mind) is the whole history of mankind any less ephemeral than the life of any single individual, in the face of the vast annihilation of eternity?

In *The Science of Life* the reality of individuality is attacked upon the evidence of modern science, skilfully and subtly indeed but mainly irrelevantly. For the individual individuality is his own self-consciousness, or more precisely

[1] *Points of View*, III.
[2] *Death*.

his own consciousness of awareness. That is the essence of pragmatism. Individuality may be an illusion, but if so it is an illusion as potent as that of free will—an illusion by which we live. To question individuality because a plant or tree or lower organism is capable of indefinite sub-division is to question beside the point, for the consciousness existing in these is beyond human realisation and thus, humanly speaking, non-existent.

Carefully summarising his point of view in his broadcast address, Wells characteristically refused to be identified "in any real sense" with "a certain ill and angry young man of twenty who lived in 1886. He was struggling in the world under what he thought was an unjustly heavy handicap, and he talked and he wrote. I have photographs of him as he was then; I have stuff that he wrote. And for the life of me I cannot identify my present self with him. I have left him behind almost as completely as I have left my grandfather behind." [1] But indeed if this present biographical sketch has any value at all it must have shown precisely that continuity of individuality between that young man of 1886 and the H. G. Wells of 1929 which cannot possibly be said to have existed between the Joseph Wells of Penshurst Castle and his grandson. If this book has not revealed Wells as authentically and continuously Wellsian, in voice, in feature, in ideas, in the manner of expression as of thought, then it has failed. It has failed if it has not shown, even, that Wells came to his final denial of such identity on grounds not of any objective evidence but of subjective necessity.

It is of course in the last resort open to Wells to claim for his belief the pragmatic test—that it works. It gave him, he said in his address, "a certain mastery over the greed, the fears, the passions and the vanities that troubled my earlier days," and rid him altogether of the fear of death.[2]

Yet one may still ask: does it really satisfy? "Unless

[1] *Points of View*, III.
[2] *Ibid.*

there is a more abundant life before mankind, this scheme of space and time is a bad joke beyond our understanding, a flare of vulgarity, an empty laugh, braying across the mysteries." [1] To set one's hope in the future because the present is intolerable—is that the authentic result of a knowledge that "everything is right"? Is not a dissatisfaction, subconscious at least, manifest in his impatience for reform, his inability to brood calmly upon experience, his desire (as someone has said of Remington) for "experiences rather than experience"? Does it not appear in his frequent expressions of boredom with the world of today, his tirades against "the clothes we wear and the food we eat, the houses we live in, the schools we have, our amusements, our money," [2] and so on, his fascist tendency (despite the mockery of *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham*) to seek the overruling of opposition by sheer force, his attitude to the common man? Once he could write of the Kippses and Pollys of this world with a deep and tender sympathy; in *The Secret Places of the Heart* Sir Richmond Hardy objurgated against them as "just vain repetitions—imperfect—dreary, blurred repetitions of one common life." The world, says Wells in his own person, is not for the multitude but for the best, the exceptional minority. It is an admissible attitude—not the artist's, however (whose concern is not with best but with being), but the journeyman's who must busy himself in building for the day.

§ 4

It is not ungrateful, I hope, to value him in his latest phase mainly as propagandist for many good causes, and as—social irritant. He has always conceived the work of the literary man as "not steady achievement but suggestion. Our business is to throw out ideas, and throw them out rather

[1] *Story of a Great Schoolmaster.*
[2] *Year of Prophesying: An Outbreak of Auto-Obituary.*

recklessly."[1] He stimulates to new thought continually, and that his criticisms are on the whole more satisfying than his constructive plans only helps to define his function the more certainly and does not make him less essentially creative of change. He establishes a state of mind which rises without difficulty—even without conscious thought—above the barriers of social and historical tradition, and which tends to regard change as not only necessary but normal and indeed inevitable. He evokes a dream and a desire, and from these—more than from any intellectual conviction—springs the creative will. He is in the line of what Mr. Sempack called the great Utopographers.

Yet finally it is as an artist that one acknowledges and acclaims him. He has, since the 'nineties, set glowing above us in the literary firmament not a few bright stars, the excitement and admiration of whose first discovery we do not easily forget. They shine not less clearly today. Nevertheless his contemporary position is paradoxical; he is at once a popular and an isolated figure. With the doubtful exception of Bernard Shaw, no living writer of this calibre gains so wide a hearing from the man in the street, yet his influence with the post-war intelligentsia of England and America is all but imperceptible. Sinclair Lewis one might point to as having drunk of the fountain, but though the more representative British figures of the Sitwells, Aldous Huxley, Lawrence and Joyce may have paid their tributes to that unfailing spring of humour and imagination and wisdom, they seek other sources for their refreshment.

He also stands apart from the established writers of his own generation—Bennett, Conrad, Galsworthy—in that for him the great Continental novelists might never have existed. To think of Galsworthy is to remember Turgenev, and *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Lord Jim* owe an acknowledged debt to the French Masters. Wells's own scorn for the stylistic and formal deliberations of these writers (and Henry James) has already appeared, but a passage from a

[1] *Record of Old Students Association, R.C.S.*

letter printed in the *English Review* for August 1920 is worth quoting: "Literature is not jewellery, it has quite other aims than perfection, and the more one thinks of 'how it is done' the less one gets it done. These critical indulgences lead along a fatal path, away from every natural interest towards a preposterous emptiness of technical effort, a monstrous egotism of artistry, of which the later work of Henry James is the monumental warning. 'It,' the subject, the thing or the thought, has long since disappeared in these amazing works; nothing remains but the way it has been 'manipulated.'" [1] Wells, like Mr. Mergleson in *Bealby,* gets his effects by dash; he carries on, though with innovations, the English tradition of exuberant discursiveness found in Smollett, Sterne and Dickens. It accords with his vision of life as not static but flowing, and his inexhaustible invention, his keen feeling for life, and his abundant humour have stood him in good stead, for even when the plan falters the brilliant episode remains. Naturally his short stories—each an episode—are among the least vulnerable critically of his works; Mr. Middleton Murry has even said, with an exaggeration easier to understand than justify, that only in these can Wells be termed an artist at all.

His innovations have been mainly intellectual in quality. The scientific romances, which are unique, are of course almost completely so; they are perhaps best understood, in their original dependence upon some simple idea, as expanded short stories, growing gradually towards the novel. But in the novels proper, in *Tono-Bungay, The New Machiavelli,* and that one successful experiment in the dialogue form, *The Undying Fire,* one encounters an intellectual power and criticism which in its kind is new in

[1] It may be remarked how very precisely this idea of the work of art in which the subject eventually entirely vanishes, is embodied in a short story written by Wells in 1925, *The Pearl of Love,* in which a lover builds a great monument about the coffin of his queen, only at last to expel the latter as a blemish upon the perfect beauty of the whole. Wells comments in the tale: "Nor can I decide ... whether *The Pearl of Love* is the cruellest of stories or only a gracious fable of the immortality of beauty."

English literature, but which may well find its disciples when the present post-war mood of professional disillusion begins to subside. The later books, in which, in Mr. J. D. Beresford's phrase, "Wells the reformer, Wells the novelist, and Wells the journalist form an indivisible trinity," represent a less acceptable attempt, and the result is a hybrid which does not impel to reform because it carries no conviction of life. It is unlikely to find imitators, not for the reason given by Mr. Beresford, that Wells "has not given us a new form, he has only displayed his contempt for all conventional limitations; and to imitate him successfully in that, the imitator must have an equal measure of genius" [1] but rather because, with all his genius, even his success is at best intermittent and infrequent.

He himself refuses to make any claims upon the future as a writer. He has confessed his "profound disbelief in any perfect or permanent work of art. All art, all science, and still more certainly all writing are experiments in statement. There will come a time for every work of art when it will have served its purpose and be bereft of its last rag of significance." [2] That is the view of the man who terms himself journalist rather than artist, not in modesty but because he values a work of art more for its logical statement than its quality of life. Yet even those who accept his standpoint may believe that for very many years yet a considerable proportion of his writings will remain a continuously eruptive source of suggestion and inspiration and delight. Many of the topical and sociological works have already served their purpose and ceased to signify, but *A Modern Utopia* will live by its evocative qualities, and *Anticipations, The Discovery of the Future,* and *The Open Conspiracy* have, like *Boon* and *First and Last Things,* an abiding interest as personal confessions of faith. The unity of *The Outline of History* as one man's vision of the human past will preserve it even when it ceases to be unique. The romances

[1] Introduction, Atlantic Edition.
[2] *Tradition and Experiment: Experiment in the Novel.*

Cooper Union Library

and the short stories are too prodigal of wonder and fascination—purely romantic, however intellectual—not to survive almost in their entirety. Among the novels the mortality must be greater, though *Marriage* will continue to be read for Mr. Pope, *The Dream* for Matilda Good, and *Men Like Gods* for the Quarantine Crag and last chapters. *The Wheels of Chance* is young Wells, but it is as delightful as the summer holiday it describes. Almost all the novels from *Love and Mr. Lewisham* to *The New Machiavelli* are of consistently high quality, and with them must be set at least *Bealby, Mr. Britling, The Undying Fire,* and *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham,* though even in the worst books, with one or two exceptions, one may discover phrases or characters or episodes to equal almost any in the best.

Wells has, of course, his detractors, but few responsible critics will be found to deny that he is in any meaning of the term a great man. Anatole France described him as the greatest intellectual force in the English-speaking world, and he himself has written truly of the collected edition of his works that "there is in the ultimate reckoning something said in these volumes that was not said before, and something shaped that was not shaped before." [1] The hundred or so books and pamphlets which preserve the bulk of his writings represent an activity and an achievement unequalled by any other living author, a range of inquiry, criticism, entertainment, suggestion and information which is remarkable. It is an achievement, too, more enduring than many of his critics seem to recognise, for quite apart from the mere organised "knowledge" and the astounding wealth of human creation, he has written some of the finest passages in modern prose, and possesses a quality of imaginative intuition which again and again lifts his work to a poetic plane. By that quality a round dozen at least of his books will carry his name even beyond our own century into that literary immortality he seems so anxious to avoid: *The Invisible Man, The War of the Worlds, The Time*

[1] Introduction, Atlantic Edition.

Machine, possibly *A Modern Utopia, Kipps, The War in the Air, Tono-Bungay, The History of Mr. Polly, The New Machiavelli, Mr. Britling, The Undying Fire,* and a group of short stories which may be counted as one book: *The Star, The Door in the Wall, The Country of the Blind, Under the Knife, The Story of the Late Mr. Elvesham, The Man Who Could Work Miracles,* and *A Vision of Judgment.*

The New Machiavelli is surely the best possible example of the vitality of a work of art triumphing over its ostensible subject; the reader who cares nothing at all for the political scene of twenty-five years ago may still find in its pages a living man and a living world. Even so will Wells himself conquer his apparent impermanence by the vitality of his genius.

APPENDICES
AND
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I

A NOTE ON STUDENT WRITINGS AND *THE TIME MACHINE*

A VERY evident omission from the record of Wells's student and teaching days is any account of his early contributions to the *Science Schools Journal*. He himself regards them as "imitative puerile stuff," and at the beginning of the century "bought up all the back numbers then in stock with the current editor, so far as they concerned me, and destroyed them. I don't think there are any sets left in the world." His purpose was "to prevent the curious wasting their time," but a certain, even critical, interest is unavoidable in the first printed work of any notable writer, and in view of the rarity of copies, and of the difficulty that the items appeared over various signatures and scattered among forty-eight numbers (exclusive of two autobiographical articles written some years later), a list and brief commentary may be welcome:

Preface. By the Editor. No. 1, December 1886.
Socrates. By Herbert G. Wells. No. 1, December 1886.
Mammon. By Walker Glockenhammer. No. 2, January 1887.
A Talk with Gryllotalpa. By Septimus Browne, No. 3, February 1887.
Protylian Vapourings. By H. G. W. No. 3, February 1887.
A Tale of the Twentieth Century. By S. B. No. 6, May 1887.
A Vision of the Past. By Sosthenes Smith, No. 7, June 1887.
The Chronic Argonauts. By H. G. Wells, Nos. 11, 12, 13, April, May, June 1888.
The Devotee of Art. By "Tyro." Nos. 15, 16, November, December 1888.

Walcote. By H. G. Wells, Nos. 16, 17, December 1888, January 1889.

The Lamias. By H. G. Wells. No. 18, February 1889.

Something Good from Birmingham. By H. G. W. No. 19, April 1889.

On Capital Punishment. By H. G. Wells. No. 23, February 1890.

The Lay of the Sausage Machine. By H. G. Wells. No. 27, November 1890.

"Specimen Day" (From a Holiday Itinerary). By H. G. Wells. No. 33, October 1891.

The Beginning of the Journal. By the First Editor. No. 48, October 1893.

Something Good from Birmingham is a review in a few lines of another amateur magazine. *Protylian Vapourings* and *The Lay of the Sausage Machine* are examples of Wells's rare excursions into verse, the former celebrating a paper on "The New Atomic Theory," read to the Debating Society by A. E. H. Tutton, the latter a nonsensical allegory—but how prophetic!—of the triumph of the Man of Science over the Poet. *Socrates, Mammon,* and *A Talk with Gryllotalpa* exhibit Wells as social rebel and moralist, disciple of Ruskin and Carlyle. *A Tale of the Twentieth Century* is a high-spirited account of the disastrous application of a perpetual motion machine to the London underground railways, *A Vision of the Past* a satirical comment upon humanity's complacent view of itself as the end and triumph of evolution. All these one imagines were written for the *Journal—The Devotee of Art* suggests a wider ambition; it was probably intended for more profitable publication and only came to these pages when rejected elsewhere. In 1895, much abbreviated and improved, but preserving several passages of dialogue unchanged, it reappeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents* as *The Temptation of Harringay. Walcote* seems to derive from Poe; highly coloured and melodramatic, it has something of the eerie atmosphere of *The Red Room,* and is certainly not without incipient narrative and dramatic

ability. *The Lamias* is little more than a youthfully cynical comment upon the supposed deceit of women. *On Capital Punishment* is an early effort in the style of the newspaper essays reprinted in *Certain Personal Matters,* a semi-humorous account of the various methods of public execution; there are a few good phrases, but the style lacks individuality. *'Specimen Day'* is a farcical account of a journey by tricycle from Petersfield to Crawley in Sussex, a reminiscence of an actual ride over that route made some years before with Frank Wells. The assured manner of the reminiscent *Beginning of the Journal* contrasts vividly with the schoolboy facetiousness of the original *Preface*; here the now professional journalist makes public confession of his amateur sins!

It is, however, *The Chronic Argonauts* to which interest principally attaches, though less, perhaps, for its intrinsic merits than as a first version of *The Time Machine.* There were, altogether, from *Journal* to book, not less than six versions, written over a period of nearly eight years and four of them printed, each a deliberate attempt to improve upon its precursor. This struggle to embody satisfactorily the brilliantly original idea of time-travelling might in itself be said almost to constitute his literary apprenticeship.

The idea had come to him one day in the Schools Debating Society during a discussion following the reading of a paper—by another student—on the fourth dimension. He wrote *The Chronic Argonauts* either at Holt or, more probably, at Uppark early in 1888. In it the inventor, Dr. Nebogipfel, puts the same question to the local vicar as the Time Traveller to his incredulous guests: Can an instantaneous cube exist? and proceeds in similar fashion to expound time as the fourth dimension and assert the possibility of time-travelling. The settings and incidents are otherwise quite different. Nebogipfel establishes himself in a haunted house in a North Welsh village, and his eccentric behaviour causes the superstitious villagers to attack and burn the building. The vicar comes ahead of the mob to warn the inventor,

learns his astounding secret, and escapes with him on the Chronic Argo. At this point the story breaks off, though vague references have already made it evident that they travelled far into the future and had strange experiences there. The fact was that Wells's illness made it impossible for him to proceed, and though he intended to do so when better, other circumstances intervened. Thus it remains an ill-proportioned fragment, and can only be judged as such. The writing is certainly immature, and even imitative, yet it displays a considerable command of detail and some originality of phrase. The description of the inventor may be quoted as typical of faults and qualities alike:

"His aquiline nose, thin lips, high cheek-ridges, and pointed chin, were all small and mutually well proportioned; but the bones and muscles of his face were rendered excessively prominent and distinct by his extreme leanness. The same cause contributed to the sunken appearance of the large eager-looking grey eyes, that gazed forth from under his phenomenally wide and high forehead. It was this latter feature that most powerfully attracted the attention of an observer. It seemed to be great beyond all preconceived ratio to the rest of his countenance. Dimensions, corrugations, wrinkles, venation, were alike abnormally exaggerated. Below it his eyes glowed like lights in some cave at a cliff's foot. It so overpowered and suppressed the rest of his face as to give an *unhuman* appearance almost, to what would otherwise have been an unquestionably handsome profile. The lank black hair that hung unkempt before his eyes served to increase rather than conceal this effect, by adding to unnatural altitude a suggestion of hydrocephalic projection; and the idea of something ultra-human was furthermore accentuated by the temporal arteries that pulsated visibly through his transparent yellow skin."

Back in London again, he decided not to continue but to rewrite, and between 1889 and 1892 produced two separate versions, for the following account of which I am indebted to Professor A. Morley Davies, who read and

discussed them with Wells at the time: "In the first rewriting Dr. Nebogipfel and the Rev. Elijah Ulysses Cook still appear, but the scene shifts to a village on the South Downs. They arrive in a future much less changed from our time than that portrayed in *The Time Machine*. The upper and lower worlds exist, but their inhabitants are not yet two distinct species. A scientific aristocracy still survives in a decadent form as a red-robed priesthood, and art and literature are cultivated in a very dilettante manner. The chronic argonauts stir up these weary idlers, and even make it fashionable to read books. The priests take their visitors to see a vast museum, but themselves grow bored and leave the pair to explore alone, warning them against the passages which lead 'down.' They go 'down,' and discover an underworld working to support the upper world. Eventually some compunction is aroused among the aristocracy, and some kindly disposed persons descend to sing and play to the workers. At this the underworld explodes into revolution, kills them, and rushes up in a mob to carry out a general massacre. In the ensuing panic the argonauts make for their machine. Cook has become fascinated by a certain Lady Dis, and tries to take her with him, but in the excitement of the escape he discovers" (a reminiscence of *The Lamias*) "that all her beauty is artificial, and flings her off as he climbs into the machine. They travel back to our own time, but overshoot the mark and are nearly killed by a party of palæolithic men. At last they hit the nineteenth century, when Nebogipfel drops Cook and then vanishes with the machine.

"In the third version, of which fragments only were read to me, Nebogipfel and Cook are cut out. There is no such underworld as in the earlier version and *The Time Machine,* the future being one in which a ruling class governs by hypnotism, but the end of the story is somewhat similar to that given above. One of the priests determines to put an end to the hypnotism, and calls to the people to awake. They awake and kill him, and march with his head

on a pole to slay his fellows. In the panic the same revelation is made of the artificial means by which the ruling class has hidden the physical degeneration resulting from their idle life. This third version never pleased me, and I was glad when *The Time Machine* went back to something nearer the original idea."

The next writing was late in 1893, and appeared in the *National Observer* in 1894 (March 17th, 24th, 31st, April 21st, 28th, May 19th, June 23rd); it is the first recognisable casting of the familiar story. Certain incidents—such as the landing by the White Sphinx, and the descent to the underworld of the Morlocks (already thus named, though the Eloi are still anonymous)—are given practically as in the book, but the writing itself is definitely less finished and satisfying. The instalments are as follows: (1) The Philosophical Inventor expounds his ideas of time and his "inkling" of a Time Machine. (2) He has travelled without landing, and describes the sensations. (3) He shows his guests the machine and begins an account of his second trip and landing in the world of the future (not of A.D. 802,701, however, but of the comparatively unadventurous 12,203, though the setting is essentially the same!). (4) He describes the people of the upper world, and (5) explains their evolutionary development. Between this and (6), which records the descent to the underworld, there is an evident omission. In (7) he relates how the interest of the Morlocks in the Time Machine alarmed him, and his return forthwith to the present. The ultimate cooling of the sun and the end of earthly life are briefly sketched, but as hypothesis and not as experience; there is no attempt to develop the Further Vision of the book, its most memorable feature. It ends ineptly. The inventor is speaking: " 'But an end comes. Life is a mere eddy, an episode, in the great stream of universal being, just as man with all his cosmic mind is a mere episode in the story of life—' He stopped abruptly. 'There is that kid of mine upstairs crying. He always cries when he

wakes up in the dark. If you don't mind, I will just go up and tell him it's all right.'"

The *New Review* serial version was written in 1894, and differs from the book mainly in the opening, which instead of the brilliant dramatic plunge into the after-dinner scene consists of some explanatory paragraphs about the Time Traveller and his weekly gatherings, and only after several pages of much less vivid discussion merges into the second page or so of the book. Also towards the end there is a brief episode, subsequently deleted, in which the Traveller, pausing between the ages of the Eloi and the giant crustaceans, finds the dying world inhabited by the last descendants of man, "puny greyish things, like half-grown kangaroos," and by great centipedes which prey upon them. This was the version which Wells declared his "trump card," but it does seem as though only in the book itself were the last irrelevancies, the last weaknesses, finally trimmed away. It is, as it stands, one of the astutest books in the world.

Its appearance, at last, had one sequel of minor importance but interesting as establishing Wells as probably the first author of note to be brought into contact with the then embryo motion picture business. The incident is detailed in Mr. Terry Ramsaye's American "history of the motion picture," *A Million and One Nights*. There the reader learns how Mr. Robert W. Paul, a London maker of scientific instruments and a pioneer of the cinema, had achieved in 1895 the first successful projection upon a screen (the earlier Edison Kinetoscopes were peep-show machines), and was wondering how to make the fullest use of his invention when he read *The Time Machine* and saw in it the possibilities of an elaborate entertainment combining screens with rocking platforms to give the impression of travelling. He conferred with Wells, and the result was a British patent application (No. 19984) which anticipated by three decades the modern photoplay, embodying "not only the cut-back and close-up but also the fade-in and fade-out,

the overlap-dissolving of scenes into each other and all of the supplemental tonal effects of sunshine, fog, rain, moonlight and the like, now common to the screen drama." In fact it would seem that Wells had nothing whatever to do with the details of the patent specification, and that the technical credit must go solely to Mr. Paul, for the latter tells me: "Mr. Wells called, at my suggestion, at my old office at 44 Hatton Garden—probably at the end of 1895—and I clearly recall the incident. I had already taken steps to develop the Kinetoscope into a projecting apparatus, which I then named the Theatrograph. Having read *The Time Machine* I thought it a suitable basis for the proposed entertainment and therefore asked Mr. Wells to discuss the idea. He was evidently interested and helped by suggesting various books, including *Extinct Monsters* by Hutchinson, which I still have. The optical devices and means for carrying out the idea were, so far as I recollect, not discussed in detail; *the specification had already been lodged in the Patent Office.* I do not think Mr. Wells showed any interest, or knowledge of the working details, in respect of motion pictures; very few people knew of such or of their possibilities.... He did not pursue the matter, and it was not feasible for me to carry it out to its realization, on the score of expense and in the face of the opinion of those who, like Sir Augustus Harris, firmly believed that the motion picture would be 'dead' in a few months."

Mr. Ramsaye also ingeniously suggests the Kinetoscope as the inspiration of the story itself: "The operation of the Time Traveller was very like the starting of the peep-show Kinetoscope, and the optical effect experienced by the fictional adventurer was identical with that experienced in viewing a speeding film." As the first Kinetoscopes arrived in London only towards the autumn of 1894, and the story was already shaping to its final form, and included some of the significant incidents, in 1893, it would seem, however, that the supposition is less than probable—it is not even possible.

Wells's subsequent connection with the cinema may be summarised in a few lines. Unambitious film versions of some of his books—*The Wheels of Chance, The First Men in the Moon, Kipps, The Passionate Friends*—have been produced in England and America since the war. *The King Who Was a King* is a film scenario based upon a sketch for a film to be entitled *The Peace of the World,* but never produced. In 1929 three short comedy films, "specially invented" by Wells for the screen, were shown in British cinemas—*Bluebottles, The Tonic, Day-dreams.* These were adapted by his son Frank Wells, and directed by Ivor Montagu.

II

A NOTE ON DICKENSIAN PARALLELS

The name of Charles Dickens has appeared a number of times in this book, and in any critical account of Wells its recurrence is inevitable. But the biographical parallels are even more striking, and I think well worth calling attention to briefly.

To start at the beginning, we have in each case the same lack of ancestors; even their grandparents exist for us only as shadows, and apparently existed no more effectively for them. Each suffered illness in boyhood which kept him from the rougher games of his schoolfellows, and so turned him to imaginative outlets—the inventing of marvellous games upon the nursery (or kitchen) floor, the finding in books of yet more marvellous adventures in which each became at once the eager protagonist. As Dickens at Chatham would steal away to his father's upstairs room with its little library, so would Wells to the Uppark attic; there, alone, each could lose himself for hours in his reading.

Both were the victims of the private academy, though in neither case were schooldays actually unhappy; both found early prophetic outlet in the production of crude manuscript magazines. For both at a very youthful age came a father's misfortunes to take them from school and from those places which had seen the awakening of their boyhood imaginations, to thrust them, for a period of misery and despair in which they resented this deprivation of education, into the cruel machine of a complacent commercial enterprise. Both returned to school and presently made a

new start on better terms, yet each had, in Dickens's phrase, to battle his own way out of poverty and obscurity. And though subsequently each took himself seriously as a writer, neither had ever much patience with æsthetic or stylistic subtleties. In this matter of style, how Dickensian Wells can be, and yet remain essentially Wellsian, may be studied in the short story, *Miss Winchelsea's Heart;* and Wells is certainly, in manner, fecundity, vigour, and in the vitality and humour of his creations, frequently extraordinarily Dickensian.

Neither was content to be story-teller solely and simply, though in the result their refusals took dissimilar forms. Both met consequently with the same criticism and reproach. They took similar delight in new enterprises. Wells actually sought to revive the Dickensian mode of publication by proposing to bring out *The History of Mr. Polly* in periodical parts until the vein should be exhausted, and later, for other reasons, did produce *The Outline of History* and *The Science of Life* in that form. He has never edited a newspaper, but a few years ago, when he was offered control of a very well-known weekly, he refused against his inclination only because certain incidental conditions could not be fulfilled. He, too, has had his enemies, and the same charge of vulgarity has been brought against him as against Dickens by those who conceive of literature as an affair of the drawing-room only. Had he lived seventy years ago the biographical parallels might have been carried even farther; then, similar personal strains and stresses might have produced identical results. Living today, he reaches an easier and more satisfying solution, and—if possessed at times by a corresponding restlessness—a saner balance.

Even physically there are striking similarities, especially in certain adolescent full-face portraits, and in the identical terms adopted by friends to describe the power and liveliness of their blue-grey eyes. Both appear as sociable, energetic equally in writing, talking, walking, and playing—

companionable and sympathetic, yet with strange negligences, in their personal relationships. Wells has never figured beyond the family stage, yet he is a very fine mimic, and but for a restrictive voice might have made as notable an actor as Dickens. That vivid description of a week-end at Gad's Hill, given by Mr. Ralph Straus in his book on Dickens, might equally well serve for a visit to Easton Glebe and certainly not least in its concluding reflection: "And, as the train bears you away, you find yourself in the best of tempers, and wonder a little at things, for this kindly, boisterous man who has made the hours pass so quickly is not just a man who writes popular novels; he is ... possibly the most famous man in the world."

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INDEX

N = FOOTNOTE Q = QUOTED

Academy for Young Gentlemen, The, q. 29 ff., 63 ff., 76
Adventures of Tommy, The, 126
Allen, Grant, 120
America, Visits to, 135, 214 ff.
Ann Veronica, 35, 130, 158, 166 ff., 181, 242, 245 ff.
Anticipations, 61, 115 ff., 129, 144, 147, 160 ff., 221 ff., 241 ff., 246, 254; q. 129, 144, 166, 221 ff., 238
Anticipations of a World Peace, 205
Art of Staying at the Seaside, On the, 93
Asquith Will Die, Mr., q. 172 n.
Astor, W. W., 93
Athenæum, 97
Atlantic Edition of Wells's Works, 225; Introduction, q. 34, 254 ff.; Prefaces, q. 106 ff., 161 ff., 179, 187, 195, 202, 206, 225, 239, 241
Autocracy of Mr. Parham, The, 181, 229, 255

Bacon, Roger, 224
Balfour, 219
Balzac, 114
Baring, Maurice, 178
Barker, Ernest, 107
Barrie, J. M., 93, 103
Battle of Bungledum, The, 40
Baxter, William, q. 33
Bealby, 181 ff., 246, 253
Beaverbrook, Lord, 215
Beginning of the Journal, The, 260 ff.
Belloc, Hilaire, 209
Bennett, Arnold, 127 ff., 135, 170, 252; letters to, 108, 112 ff., 127 ff., 137 ff., 140 ff., 160, 170, 177, 181, 193, 197 ff., 214
Beresford, J. D., q. 254
Bernard, James, Letter to, 197
Besier, Rudolf, 135
Birth Control, 61 ff., 218
Bland, Hubert, 139, 147
Blettsworthy on Rampole Island, Mr., 229
Bluebottles, 267
Bookman, 97
Book Man's Burden, The, q. 165
Book Unwritten, Of a, 104 ff.
Boon, 174, 191, 254; q. 249
Bradlaugh, Charles, 53
Briggs, Dr. William, 80 ff.
British Empire, 144, 199, 212
British Science Guild, 199
Britling Sees It Through, Mr., 29, 177, 187, 194 ff., 255 ff.
Bromley, Kent, 22 ff., 56
Bromley Literary Institute, 28, 33 ff.

Bromley Water-Rats, 32
Brooks, Van Wyck, q. 237
Brownrigg, Sir Douglas, 191
Bruce, Mrs. Elizabeth (*née* Healey), q. 51 ff.; *see* Healey.
Burton, William, 52, 55 ff., 66, 69 ff., 72 ff.
Burton, Mrs. W., 66, 72 ff.
Byatt, Horace, 39 ff., 43 ff., 47
Byatt, Sir Horace, 45

Capital Punishment, On, 260 ff.
Carlyle, 58, 70, 83, 260
Cassell's Popular Educator, 41
Certain Personal Matters, 29, 95, 105 n., 106, 120
Chesterton, G. K., 139
"Chitterlow," 121, 124
Christina Alberta's Father, 218 ff., 246, q. 247
Chronic Argonauts, The, 65, 70, 73, 96, 259, 261 ff.; q. 224 ff. 262
Churchill, Winston, 151, 219
Church of England, 44 ff., 169
Cinema, Connections with, 228, 265 ff.
Civil Air Transport Committee, 191
Clarke's *New Testament,* 33
Clodd, Edward, 121
Coefficients, 145
College of Preceptors, 37, 78 ff., 82, 84
Collins, Sir W. J., 66 ff., 72, 82; letters to, 71, 92
Commonsense of World Peace, The, 223, 235; q. 186
Cone, The, 73
Conrad, Joseph, 121, 127, 252
Conscientious Objectors, 187 ff.
Contemporary Novel, The, 178 ff.
Country of the Blind, The, 255; q. 106
Cowap, Samuel Evan, 39
Cowley, Mrs. I. M., Letter to, 191
Crane, Stephen, 129
Crystal Egg, The, 124
Cust, Harry, 93, 95, 118

Daily Express, 215
Daily Mail, 202, 214 ff.
Darwin, 61 ff.
Davies, Arthur Morley, 52, 58, 79; q. 262 ff.; letters to, 63, 65, 67 ff., 70, 119
Daydreams, 267
Death, 248 ff.
Death of Miss Peggy Pickersgill's Cat, The, 65
Democracy Under Revision, 222 ff., 230, 235
Devotee of Art, The, 260 ff.
Dickens, Charles, 32, 34, 114, 157, 268 ff.
Discovery of the Future, The, 115, 144, 254
Door in the Wall, The, 255
Doughty, F. H., 237; q. 201 ff.
Dramatizations, 135 ff., 214 ff.
Dream, The, 181, 218 ff., 246, 255
Dukes at Sevenoaks, 24

Eastbourne, 92 ff.
Easton Glebe, 173, 177, 234, 270
Education, 87 ff., 200 ff., 211 ff.
Elements of Reconstruction, The, 199 ff.
Empire of the Ants, The, 106
Endowment of Motherhood, 155, 172
Enemy Propaganda Committee, 203
Englishman Looks at the World, An, 172, 176
English Review, 169 ff.
Ervine, St. John, 138, 214
Examiner Examined, The, 87
Excelsior, q. 117

Experiment in Illustration, An, q. 106
Extinction of Man, The, 106

Fabian News, 149
Fabian Society, 143 ff., 148 ff., 164
Faith I Hold, The, 166
Family Herald, 65
Farren, William, Letter to, 177, 195
Faults of the Fabian, 147
Featherstonhaugh, Miss, 22, 35, 38, 71
First and Last Things, 42, 130, 146, 166, 196, 240, 243 ff., 254
First Men in the Moon, The, 111 n., 115, 128 ff, 157 n., 267
Food of the Gods, The, 110, 111 n., 112, 130, 157, 161, 243
Forecast of the World's Affairs, A, q. 223
Fortnightly Review, 85 ff.
France, Anatole, q. 215
Frog, the Pike, and the Stork, The, 69

Galsworthy, John, 252
Garnett, Edward, 114
Garvin, J. L., 145, 204
Gentleman's Magazine, 86
George, D. Lloyd, 223
George, Henry, 54
Germany, 174, 185 ff., 203 ff.
Gissing, George, 103 ff., 120, 122 ff., 134; q. 133
Gladstone, 53
Globe, 86
God, 195 ff.
God the Invisible King, 195 ff.; q. 247
Gorki, Maxim, 135, 211
Gosse, Edmund, 127
Gregory, Sir Richard, 52, 58, 91; letters to, 144, 216
Gretton, R. H., 53
Guedalla, Philip, q. 185

Harding, President, 211, 215
Harmsworth, Alfred, 77; *see* Northcliffe
Harpur, Caldwell, Letters to, 122 ff., 135, 169
Harris, 44, 46
Harris, Frank, 85 ff., 96, 103, 120
Harvey, Mrs. Emma, 26
Haynes, E. S. P., 139
Healey, Elizabeth, Letters to, 51, 68 ff., 72 ff., 81, 83, 92 ff., 96, 104, 108 n., 112, 116, 127 ff., 133
Heatherlea, 118
Henley, W. E., 94 ff., 117, 120
Henley House Magazine, 74, 77
Henley House School, 74 ff.
Herbert, Auberon, 53
Hick, Dr. Henry, 122 ff., 133; letters to, 122, 123 ff.
Hind, C. Lewis, 95, 118, 120
History of Mr. Polly, The, 29, 42, 130, 156 ff., 169, 242 ff., 246, 256, 269; q. 98
Honours Physiography, 91
Hope, Anthony, 139
Howard de Walden, Lord, 135
Humboldt, 33
Humphreys, J. H., Letters to, 176
Huxley, q. 49
Huxley, Julian, 232
Huxley, T. H., 47, 49 ff., 98, 164
Hyde's Drapery Stores, Southsea, 40 ff.

Immortality, 197, 248 ff.
Imperialism, 144, 186, 202
Individualism, 246 ff.
In the Days of the Comet, 112, 130, 157, 165, 242
In the Fourth Year, 202, 204

Introduction, "The Book of Catherine Wells," 92, 139; q. 92 ff., 142 ff.; "George Meek, Bath-chairman," q. 169; "The Gods in the Battle," q. 189; "Nocturne," q. 193; "The Pivot of Civilisation," q. 218; "Shop Slavery and Emancipation," q. 42 ff.
Invisible Man, The, 106, 108, 110 ff., 115, 120 ff., 124; q. 111
Island of Dr. Moreau, The, 96, 106, 108 ff., 111 n., 112
Italy, Visits to, 124, 190, 214

Jacobs, W. W., 103, 121
James, Henry, 104, 124, 138, 191 ff., 252 ff.; q. 164; letters to, 192 ff.
James, William, 164
Jennings, A. V., 52, 74
Jerome, J. K., 97, 103, 121, 139
Jesus, 197
Joad, C. E. M., 248
Joan and Peter, 139, 196, 200, 202, 226, 247
Johnston, Sir Harry, 189, 207
Jones, Henry Arthur, Letters to, 168, 212 ff.

Kelmscott House, 55
Kinetoscope, Edison, 265 ff.
King Who Was a King, The, 228, 267
Kipps, 29, 42, 127, 130, 138, 142, 156 ff., 161 ff., 242, 246, 256, 267
Knott, Mrs., 27

Labour, 54, 175, 216 ff.
Labour Party, 131, 147, 151 ff., 211, 216 ff., 223
Labour Revolt, The, q. 154
Labour Unrest, The, 175
Lady Frankland's Companion, 65, 70
Lamias, The, 260 ff., 263
Land Ironclads, The, 160
Lankester, Sir E. Ray, 115, 199, 207
Last Trump, The, 191
Lay of the Sausage Machine, The, 260
League of Free Nations Association, 204
League of Nations, 202 ff., 210, 213
League of Nations Society, 204 ff.
League of Nations Union, 201, 205
Lee, Sir Sidney, 121
Le Gallienne, Richard, 97
Lenin, 211 ff.
Lewis, Sinclair, 252
Little Mother up the Morderburg, 167
Little Wars, 139
Lockyer, Sir Norman, 47 ff.
London Naval Conference, 223
Love and Mr. Lewisham, 46, 112, 115, 120, 125, 128, 157, 165, 240, 255; q. 47
Lowson, J. Melvin, 84; q. 85
Loyalty of Esau Common, The, 160

"Mackridge, Mrs.," 37
Mammon, 259 ff.
Mankind in the Making, 115, 130, 147, 161, 201, 241
Man of the Year Million, The, 105 n.
Man Who Could Work Miracles, The, 255
Marriage, 133 n., 179 ff., 247, 255
Marriott-Watson, H. B., 95, 118, 120
Mason, A. E. W., 129
Masterman, C. F. G., 139, 145, 235; q. 132
Meanwhile, 164, 228

Memorandum on Peace Propaganda, 203
Men Like Gods, 218 ff., 255
Midhurst, 39 ff.
Midhurst Grammar School, 39 ff.
Midhurst Times, 45
Milne, A. A., 76
Milne, John Vine, 74 ff., 87 ff.; letters to, 31, 78, 88, 93, 121, 123 n., 126, 197
Mrs. J. V. Milne, 77
Milne, Kenneth, 76
Mind of the Race, 191, 196, 205, 238, 247, 249
Mind of the Race, The, 174, 196
Minsterworth, 55
Modern Utopia, A, 61, 115, 130, 160, 162, 164 ff., 213, 243, 254, 256
Moore, George, 103, 140
Morley, Thomas, 27 ff, 74
Morley, Mrs. and Miss, 32
Morley's Academy, 27 ff.
Morley's Bulldogs, 32
Morris, William, 53
Muddleheadedness and Russia, q. 188
Murray, Gilbert, 204, 207
Murry, J. M., 253; q. 173
My First Aeroplane, 167
My Lucky Moment, q. 28, 46, 88, 171, 173 ff.

National Observer, 95 ff., 264
Nature, 96 ff.
Neal, George, 22
Neal, Sarah; *see* Mrs. Joseph Wells.
Nevinson, H. W., 139
New Machiavelli, The, 24, 28, 61, 145, 155, 167, 169 ff., 179, 196, 227, 246, 253, 255 ff.
New Prospectus, The, 116
New Republicanism, 116, 145, 181, 221 ff., 228, 230
New Review, 95 ff.
New Teaching of History, The, 209, 214; q. 206
New Worlds for Old, 130, 150, 166
New York World, 214 ff.
Noises of Animals, The, 86
Normal School of Science, 47 ff., 56 ff.
Northcliffe, Lord, 77, 203 ff., 215
Novels of George Gissing, The, q. 104, 240

O'Connor, T. P., 97
Olivier, Sidney, 147
Open Conspiracy, 221 ff., 230 ff.
Open Conspiracy, The, 222, 228, 230 ff, 254; q. 197, 230 ff.
"Otto Noxious," 45
Ought Socialists to Live Poor?, q. 139
Oundle School, 200
Outline of History, The, 201, 206 ff., 225, 231, 233 ff., 254, 269; q. 206

Pacifism, 189
Pall Mall Budget, 95
Pall Mall Gazette, 93, 96 ff.
Passionate Friends, The, 150 ff., 267
Past and Future of the Human Race, The, 104
Paul, Robert W., 265 ff.
Peace Conference, 210
Peace of the World, The, 267
Pearl of Love, The, 253 n.
Pearson, Arthur, 97
Pearson's Magazine, 115
Phases of Mr. Sandsome, On the, 29
Pinker, J. B., 123, 129
Plato's *Republic,* 38
Playing at Peace, q. 223
Points of View, q. 247 ff.

Pollard, A. F., 217
Potted Onions, 45
Powell, York, 129
Prayer, 197
Preface (*Science Schools Journal*), 259, 261; q. 59
Preface, "The Somme," q. 190
Proportional Representation, 176, 203, 223
Protylian Vapourings, 259 ff
Pugh, Edwin, 78, 118, 120, 124
Punch, 34, 187

Question of Scientific Administrative Areas, The, 145

Radford, Dollie and Ernest, 121
Rajah's Treasure, The, 191 ff.
Ramsaye, Terry, 265; q. 266
Reckoning for the War, The, 188
Reconstruction of the Fabian Society, q. 122
Record of Old Students Association, q. 168, 251 ff.
Rediscovery of the Unique, The, 85, 96, 105
Research Magnificent, The, 156, 166, 179 ff.; q. 191, 226, 246
Richardson, Dorothy, 120
Ridge, W. Pett, 103, 118, 120, 129; letters to, 126, 128 n., 133 n.
Rimington, W. Critchell, Letter to, 213 ff.
Robbins, Amy, Catherine, 91, 94; *see* Mrs. H. G. Wells.
"Roberts, Beulah," 63 ff.; his wife, 63 ff.
Roberts, Morley, 120 ff., 134
Rogers & Denyer, 36
Rook, Clarence, 120
Ross, Sir Denison, Letters to, 206 ff.
Royal Oak Hotel, Windsor, 36
Royal College of Science, 61
Royal College of Science Magazine, 58; q. 62
Royal College of Science Old Students Association, 62
Royal Society of Literature, 138
Ruskin, 70, 89, 106
Russell, Bertrand, 145, 189
Russia, Visits to, 178, 211 ff.
Russia and England, q. 178
Russia in the Shadows, 213

St. James's Gazette, 95
St. Pancras, 239
Salvaging of Civilization, The, 214; q. 50, 53
Sanderson, F. W., 200 ff, 219
Saturday Review, 96 ff, 106
Scepticism of the Instrument, q. 60 ff.
Scholastic Frame of Mind, The, 88; q. 89
Science, 105, 216 ff.
Science of Life, The, 201, 230 ff. 249, 269
Science of Work and Wealth, The, 201, 224, 231, 233
Science Schools Debating Society, 50 ff., 56 ff., 61, 104, 261
Science Schools Journal, 58 ff., 73 ff., 104, 259
Scott, 33, 70
Sea Lady, The, 115, 128 ff., 135, 160, 241, 246; q. 241
Sea Raiders, The, 106
Secret Places of the Heart, The, 206 ff., 214; q. 247, 251
Select Conversation, A, 170
Select Conversations with an Uncle, 95, 97, 120
Shakespeare, 33, 248
Shaw, George Bernard, 55, 103, 139, 145 ff., 149 ff., 188, 194, 252
Shelley, 91
Shorter, Clement, 121, 171

Short History of the World, A, 209, 214; q. 209
Simmons, A. T., 52 ff., 56, 58, 61, 65, 117 ff.; letters to, 56 ff., 65, 67 ff., 77 ff., 83 ff., 117 ff., 182, 203
Sinclair, Upton, 135
Single Sitting Stories, 95
Sladen, Douglas, 121
Sleeper Awakes, The, q. 228
Social Democratic Federation, 54
Socialism, 54, 58, 61, 72, 143, 146, 151
Socialism and the Family, q. 143
Socialism and Politics, q. 151 ff.
Socrates, 58, 259 ff.
Something Good from Birmingham, 260
Soul of a Bishop, The, 195 ff., 206, 219
South Kensington Science and Art Department, 46
Spade House, 129, 168
Specimen Day, 260 ff.
Spectator, 168 ff.
Spencer, Herbert, 41, 44
Spender, J. A., 204
Spoils of Mr. Blandish, The, 191 ff.
Star, The, 124, 255; q. 110
Stead, W. T., 97
Steed, Wickham, 204
Sterne, 70
Stevens, G. W., 118, 120
Stevenson, R. A. M., 129
Stoke-on-Trent, 72 ff.
Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents, The, 95, 97, 120
Stopes, Dr. Marie, Letters to, 213 n., 218
Story of a Great Schoolmaster, The, 220; q. 200, 251
Story of the Days to Come, A, 122
Story of the Late Mr. Elvesham, The, 255
Story of the Stone Age, A, 124
Strand Magazine, 115
Straus, Ralph, 170; q. 270
Sturm's *Reflections,* 25, 33
Subtle, Examinee, The, 87
Suffragette Movement, 172
Sullivan, E. J., 95
Swift, 70, 83, 115
Sword of Peace, The, q. 187

Tale of the Twentieth Century, A, 259 ff.
Talk with Gryllotalpa, A, 259 ff.
Temptation of Harringay, The, 260
Tennyson, 70
Text-Book of Biology, 91; q. 87
This Misery of Boots, 147
Thomas, J. H., 204
Time Machine, The, 61, 65, 96 ff., 106, 108, 111 n., 112 ff., 166, 238, 256, 261, 263 ff.
Times, 199, 202
Tonic, The, 267
Tono-Bungay, 28, 35, 37, 39, 130, 134, 142, 156, 158 ff., 165 ff., 180, 226 ff., 242 ff., 253, 256; q. 37, 43, 244 ff.
Trotsky, q. 212
Truth, 95
Turgenev, 114
Tutton A. E. H., 51 ff., 58, 260

Under the Knife, 256
Undying Fire, The, 64, 196, 201, 206, 253, 255 ff.
Universe Rigid, The, 86
University Correspondence College, 80 ff., 87
University Correspondent, 87
University Tutorial College, 81, 84 ff., 91
University Tutorial Press, 81

Uppark, 22, 26 ff., 37 ff., 42 ff., 50, 66 ff., 82, 261, 268
Uppark Alarmist, The, 37

Verne, Jules, 115, 141 n.
Veteran Cricketer, The, 24
Vision of Judgment, A, 256
Vision of the Past, A, 106, 259 ff.
Voysey, C. F. A., 130

Walcote, 260
Wallas, Graham, 145
Walton, Mrs., 46
War, The Great, 185 ff., 194 ff., 199, 209 ff.
War and the Future, 191, 195
War in the Air, The, 106 ff., 130, 142, 156 ff., 242, 256
War of the Worlds, The, 32, 97, 106 ff., 120, 124, 256
War That Will End War, The, q. 189
Ward, Mrs. Humphry, 103, 129
Washington and the Hope of Peace, q. 215
Washington Conference, 211, 214
Way the World is Going, The, q. 171
Wealth of Mr. Waddy, The, 161
Webb, Beatrice, 139, 144 ff., 164, 170 ff.
Webb, Sidney, 139, 144 ff., 150, 170 ff.
Well at the World's End, The, q. 55
Wells, Fanny (sister), 22, 35
Wells, Frank (brother), 26 ff., 32 ff., 35, 42, 45, 68, 108, 261
Wells, Frank Richard (son) 133
Wells, Fred (brother), 26, 33, 35, 42, 68
Wells, George, 22
Wells, George Philip (son), 133, 232
Wells, Herbert George: family, 21 ff.; parents, 22 ff.; birth, 26; childhood, 26 ff.; schooling, 27 ff.; early reading, 33 ff., 70; early writing, 34, 37, 40, 45, 58 ff., 65 ff., 70, 73 ff., 85 ff., 259 ff.; shop trials, 35 ff., 39ff.; apprenticeship, 40 ff.; as teacher, 43 ff., 63 ff., 74 ff.; confirmation, 44 ff.; as teacher-in-training, 47 ff.; examinations taken, 37, 47, 50, 56, 60, 77 ff., 82, 84; engagement, 52; accident, 66; ill-health, 66 ff., 91 ff., 118, 125 ff., 213 ff., 234 ff.; marriage, 82; journalism, 93, 95 ff.; divorce and remarriage, 94; freedom, 98 ff.; literary friendships, 95 ff., 117 ff., 127, 139, 234; as scientific romancer, 104 ff.; on the novel, 104, 112 ff., 169, 178; as novelist, 112 ff., 155 ff., 237 ff.; personal life as man of letters, 117 ff., 177, 234 ff.; literary methods, 118 ff., 131; travels abroad, 124, 135, 178, 182, 190, 211 ff., 214 ff.; on Style and Art, 127 ff., 191 ff., 235; as critic, 140 ff.; literary position, 141, 251 ff.; as Fabian, 143 ff.; as lecturer, 144, 149, 235; intellectual development, 154, 238; sequence of books, 160 ff., 178 ff., 218 ff., 226 ff.; attacked by criticism, 168 ff., and gossip, 170 ff.; attitude to the war, 185 ff.; as war prophet, 187 ff.; visits to fronts, 190; a theological interlude, 195 ff.; faith in education, 200 ff.; League of Nations propaganda, 201 ff.; Director of propaganda policy, 203 ff.; as historian, 206 ff.; post-war disillusion, 209 ff.; projected

American lectures, 213 ff.; at Washington Conference, 214 ff.; on Science and Labour, 216 ff.; as Labour Party candidate, 217; not inconsistent, 221; return to New Republicanism, 221 ff.; as modern Roger Bacon, 224 ff.; as Open Conspirator, 221 ff; disposition and philosophy, 237 ff.; artistic development, 237 ff.; triumph, 242 ff., and decline, 243 ff.; final faith, 246 ff.; connection with cinema, 265 ff.; Dickensian parallels, 268 ff.
Wells, H. G., Esq., B.Sc., q. 109 ff., 141
Wells Explains Himself, Mr., q. 115 ff., 166
Wells, Mrs. H. G. (first wife), 52, 82, 91, 94
Wells, Mrs. H. G. (*née* A. C. Robbins), 91 ff., 94, 118 ff., 123 ff., 130 ff., 208, 234
Wells, Joseph (grandfather), 22, 250
Wells, Joseph (father), 21 ff., 33 ff., 43, 56, 68
Wells, Mrs. Joseph (*née* Sarah Neal; mother), 22 ff., 25 ff., 33, 35, 40, 42 ff., 66 ff., 134
Wells, Thomas, 22, 27
Whale, George, 121, 122
Whale, George: 1849–1925, q. 44
What Are the Liberals to Do?, q. 175
What I Believe, 109, 222
What Is Success?, q. 203 ff.
Wheels of Chance, The, 46, 97, 112, 165, 255, 267
When the Sleeper Wakes, 106, 108, 112, 122, 124, 228
Whitman, 70
Wife of Sir Isaac Harman, The, 179, 181
Wild Asses of the Devil, The, 174
Wilde, Oscar, 103, 106
Wilhelm II, 186
Williams, Cousin, 36 ff.
Wilson, President, 202 ff., 210
Winchelsea's Heart, Miss, 124, 269
Wonderful Visit, The, 97, 106, 108, 112, 138, 214
Wood's *Natural History*, 34
World of William Clissold, The, 61, 164 ff., 202, 226 ff.; q. 218, 237, 239
World State, 116, 144, 185, 195, 210 ff., 223, 231
Wright, P. Macer, Letter to, 135

Year of Prophesying, A, 218; q. 226, 251

Zangwill, I., 103, 120

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